

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

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## AN COISTE UM CHUNTAIS PHOIBLÍ

## COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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*Déardaoin, 4 Nollaig 2025*

*Thursday, 4 December 2025*

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The Committee met at 9.30 a.m.

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### MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Cathy Bennett,	Deputy James Geoghegan,
Deputy Grace Boland,	Deputy Eoghan Kenny,
Deputy Joanna Byrne,	Deputy Paul McAuliffe,
Deputy Albert Dolan,	Deputy Séamus McGrath,
Deputy Aidan Farrelly,	Deputy Paul Murphy.

DEPUTY JOHN BRADY IN THE CHAIR.

*The committee met in private session until 10.20 a.m.*

**Mr. Seamus McCarthy** (*An tArd Reachtaire Cuntas agus Ciste*) called and examined.

## Business of Committee

**An Cathaoirleach:** I welcome everyone to today's meeting of the Committee of Public Accounts. Before we proceed, I will go through a few housekeeping matters.

Members are reminded of the provision within Standing Order 226 that the committee shall refrain from inquiring into the merits of a policy or policies of the Government or a Minister of the Government or the merits of the objectives of such policies.

Members are also reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the Houses or an official, either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I also remind members of the constitutional requirement that, in order to participate in public meetings, members must be physically present within the confines of the Leinster House complex. Members of the committee attending remotely must do so from within the precincts of Leinster House.

Today's agenda is to discuss the minutes, accounts and statements and correspondence, as well as to confirm upcoming meetings. We will then suspend the meeting and begin our engagement with officials from Inland Fisheries Ireland. The minutes of the meeting of 27 November 2025 were agreed by the committee and will be published on the committee's website.

Three sets of accounts and financial statements were laid between 24 and 28 November 2025 and are due to be considered today. We are joined by the Comptroller and Auditor General, Mr. Seamus McCarthy, who is a permanent witness to the committee. I ask him to address these accounts and financial statements before I open the floor to members.

**Mr. Seamus McCarthy:** The financial statements of Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board for 2024 received a clear audit opinion.

The financial statements of Cork Education and Training Board for 2024 received a clear audit opinion but I drew attention to a material level of non-compliance with procurement rules.

The financial statements of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment for 2024 received a clear audit opinion.

**An Cathaoirleach:** I thank Mr. McCarthy. Do members wish to comment on any of those? No. Can we agree to note the listing of accounts and financial statements? Is that agreed? Agreed.

We will now move on to correspondence and will consider B items of correspondence, which have been received from Accounting Officers and Government bodies between 20 and 26 November 2025. The first item, No. R0368, is correspondence received from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, dated 21 November 2025, regarding the marine agencies' annual report 2024. It was agreed to note and publish this item.

Next is No. R0371, which is correspondence received from the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, dated 25 November 2025 providing a response to information requested at the meeting of the Committee of Public Accounts on 23 November. We discussed this item

last week. It was flagged again for discussion in our private session. Does Deputy Geoghegan wish to comment on this?

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** We agreed that we would seek further information. There is further information even today about this whole issue, which came to the fore when Tusla was before the committee. What seems to have been published today is another risk, that is, children who are in adult accommodation, of whom there are more than 200 according to reports today. The issue we have discussed is the risk of adults being in children's centres. On both sides of this equation, there are serious safeguarding issues. When the Department of justice was before the committee, its representatives were clear that all this was the responsibility of Tusla but in its correspondence, it has indicated that in fact, the legal responsibility is vested in the Department and as there are changes in law, it will go back to being them. However, there are huge issues as this impasse continues between two State agencies that poses real safeguarding challenges that Tusla is clearly highly concerned about and further adverse consequences could arise from that. We need to get the Department of justice to respond to that adequately and perhaps engage with Tusla again on this issue.

**An Cathaoirleach:** I concur with all that. We had a discussion about it in our private session. It is quite concerning. Even the information the Deputy alluded to, which came out overnight, involves 200 children. Our primary concern is the welfare of all children in State care. We have a remit in respect of finance and moneys but also about who has responsibility and there seems to be some ambiguity on the part of the Department and of Tusla. We have agreed to follow up on the response we got and on foot of the new information that has come to light. It is agreed we will write to the Department to follow up on that.

It was also agreed on foot of the correspondence we received from the Department in which it gave a figure of €400,000 for what was IPAS accommodation in Newtown Mount Kennedy in my constituency of Wicklow. Some €400,000 was spent on preparing and using the site in Newtown Mount Kennedy over a ten-month period. It ceased to be used for accommodation in December last year. In a meeting with the Department of justice, I asked for a specific breakdown because since that time, security has remained on site to protect an unused and unoccupied site at a considerable cost, I imagine. As the Department has stated it has no intention of further developing or using the site, I asked for a breakdown of the ongoing security costs. That was not furnished so it was agreed to write to the Department again to seek a breakdown of the security costs for an unused, unoccupied site. That was agreed.

We will move on to our work programme. Next week, on Thursday, 11 December 2025, the committee will meet the Office of the Revenue Commissioners. On Thursday, 18 December 2025, the committee will meet the Department of Social Protection and we will next week have a further discussion about our work programme for the new year.

We will move on to any other business. Are there any items members wish to flag? No. That concludes the second session. We will suspend the meeting for approximately five minutes to bring in our witnesses.

*Sitting suspended at 10.28 a.m. and resumed at 10.32 a.m.*

## Financial Statements 2023: Inland Fisheries Ireland

### Special Report No. 118 of the Comptroller and Auditor General: Governance, internal control and value for money issues in Inland Fisheries Ireland

**Mr. Barry Fox** (*Deputy Chief Executive Officer*) called and examined.

**An Cathaoirleach:** This morning we will engage with Inland Fisheries Ireland to examine the 2023 financial statements. The committee will also examine the Comptroller and Auditor General's Special Report 118 – Governance Internal Control and Value for Money Issues in Inland Fisheries Ireland. We are joined by the following officials from Inland Fisheries Ireland: Mr. Barry Fox, deputy chief executive officer, Ms Suzanne Campion, head of finance and corporate services, Dr. Fiona Kelly, head of research, policy and risk, Mr. Milton Matthews, acting head of operations, and Mr. Michael Cusack, field services manager. We are also joined by an official from the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment who is here in a representative capacity, namely, Ms Martina Hennessy, assistant secretary general. Finally, we are joined by officials from the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General: the Comptroller and Auditor General, Mr. Seamus McCarthy, who is a permanent witness to the committee and Ms Ruth Foley, deputy director of audit. They are all very welcome.

I wish to explain some limitations to parliamentary privilege, and the practice of the Houses as regards reference witnesses may make to other persons in their evidence. The evidence of witnesses physically present or who give evidence from within the parliamentary precincts is protected, pursuant to both the Constitution and statute, by absolute privilege. This means that they have an absolute defence against any defamation action for anything they say at the meeting. However, they are expected not to abuse this privilege, and it is my duty as Cathaoirleach to ensure that this privilege is not abused. Therefore, if their statements are potentially defamatory in relation to an identifiable person or entity, they will be directed to discontinue their remarks. It is imperative that they comply with any such direction.

Witnesses are also reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice that you should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity, by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable, or otherwise engage in speech that might be regarded as damaging to the good name of the person or entity. Therefore, if their statements are potentially defamatory in relation to an identifiable person or entity, they will be directed to discontinue their remarks. It is imperative that they comply with any such direction.

I now call on the Comptroller and Auditor General, Mr. Seamus McCarthy, for his opening statement.

**Mr. Seamus McCarthy:** As members are aware, the remit of Inland Fisheries Ireland is to protect, manage and conserve Ireland's inland fisheries and sea-angling resources. IFI's income in 2023 amounted to €40.5 million. More than 90% of its income comes from State funding sources. Most of the remaining income is derived from fee income for permits, licences and fishery rates.

IFI's expenditure in 2023 amounted to €41.2 million. More than 70% of the expenditure, or €29.3 million, was in respect of remuneration and other pay and pension costs. Some €9.9 million was spent on field operations, with €2.3 million spent on administration expenses.

I certified the 2023 financial statements on 13 December 2024 and issued a clear audit opinion. However, I drew attention in my audit report to issues of concern regarding IFI's governance arrangements and the adequacy of its internal control systems that are dealt with in more detail in the special report that is before the committee this morning. I had drawn attention to some of the same concerns in my reports on the 2022 and 2021 audits, and because the matters remained ongoing, I felt a more in-depth examination was required.

The board of a State agency is the principal decision-making body in relation to the organisation's strategic direction and oversees the performance of its operations. It is also responsible for ensuring the safeguarding of the assets it controls and compliance with governance norms. The chairperson of the IFI board resigned in April 2022. A new chairperson was appointed in May 2022 but resigned in January 2023. A further four resignations from the board occurred during 2022 and in January 2023. As a result, the board effectively became unable to reach the required quorum to meet and to make decisions, including approval of the annual financial statements.

In February 2023, the remaining board members were stood down by the then Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications on a no-fault basis. Using statutory provisions in the relevant legislation, the Minister appointed two persons on a temporary basis to perform the functions of IFI. As well as day-to-day oversight, they commissioned an independent review of IFI's governance, which resulted in a December 2023 report setting out recommendations for change. A new board commenced operations in January 2024.

The main reason IFI exists is to secure the protection and conservation of fisheries resources, including both fish stocks and their habitats. IFI's capacity to achieve this through active patrolling on Irish waters diminished in 2019, when the number of staff qualified to lead such patrols dropped sharply due to a decrease in the number of staff trained to the required standard along with the retirement and departure of trained staff from the organisation. IFI's capacity to undertake patrolling was gradually restored through training of additional personnel, and the fleet of 12 patrol boats was replaced at a cost of €3.5 million. By 2023, IFI was achieving around 81% of its target of 25 patrols per boat per year.

IFI has the power to initiate prosecutions for serious fisheries and environmental offences, including fish kills and water pollution. However, in March 2023, it discovered that formal delegated authority from the board allowing its officers to initiate these prosecutions was not in place. Because of that gap, IFI had to withdraw many live prosecution cases. This had a significant impact on IFI's ability to carry out its protection role and created a risk of financial loss and additional legal costs for the organisation. Prosecutions recommenced in June 2023 when formal delegated sanction was put in place.

Between 2019 and 2021, IFI received around €1.2 million from the Dormant Accounts Fund. There were weaknesses in how IFI managed this funding. Internal audit reviews commissioned by the board showed that, in some cases, it was not clear that the spending fully matched the purpose of the funding. As a result, IFI repaid over €28,000 to its parent Department in 2022.

IFI owns a substantial period property called Aasleagh Lodge adjacent to the Erriff river in County Mayo. The grounds of the lodge encompass two self-catering cottages and an IFI operations base, which limits the income potential of the property. Over several years, there

were significant deficiencies in control over the letting and management of the lodge and cottages. This exposed IFI to unnecessary financial risk.

Between November 2021 and February 2023, the then CEO's work base was changed from IFI's headquarters at Citywest to the regional offices in Ballyshannon, County Donegal. There is no evidence that a proper analysis was carried out or a formal business case prepared to support this change, or that the change was properly authorised. During that period, the CEO received over €7,900 in subsistence expenses due to the change, of which €1,000 was repaid to IFI after the change was reversed.

The work carried out by IFI staff is mostly field based, with a range of vehicles needed to perform its statutory functions. Notwithstanding this, the vehicle fleet operated by IFI appears to have been excessive in scale when compared to the number of staff. There were also benefit-in-kind tax issues in respect of vehicles used by IFI staff, resulting in settlements with the Revenue Commissioners totalling around €296,000.

In addition, an administrative error in July 2021 led to some of IFI's vehicle fleet being uninsured for a period. This only came to light when one of the vehicles was involved in a road traffic accident. The direct costs incurred by IFI in relation to the road traffic accident totalled almost €230,000 by the end of 2023.

Taken together, the many issues raised in the report indicate the development of an inadequate and inappropriate system of control, which seriously undermines public confidence in IFI's ability to carry out the important functions with which it is charged. The findings from the audit by my office of the draft 2024 financial statements are currently being reviewed. I expect to complete the audit by the end of the year.

**An Cathaoirleach:** I thank Mr. McCarthy. I now ask the deputy chief executive officer to give the opening statement on behalf of Inland Fisheries Ireland. As set out in the letter of invitation, he has five minutes to make his opening statement.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an gCathaoirleach agus leis an gcoiste ar an ócáid seo and for the opportunity to appear before the committee today to discuss the Comptroller and Auditor General's Special Report 118 and the financial statements for 2023.

We are pleased to discuss our work, the challenges we have faced, and the new opportunities ahead, as Inland Fisheries Ireland looks to the future with confidence. I am the deputy chief executive of IFI, serving in this role on an interim basis. The recruitment process for a chief executive is currently under way through the Public Appointments Service. I am joined by supporting witnesses, Ms Suzanne Champion, head of finance and corporate services; Dr. Milton Matthews, acting head of operations; Dr. Fiona Kelly, head of research, policy and risk; and Mr. Michael Cusack, field services manager.

I acknowledge at the outset the findings of the Comptroller and Auditor General's report, which highlighted a number of governance and control weaknesses within the organisation, the regularity of certain transactions and value-for-money issues. Inland Fisheries Ireland fully accepts the findings of this report, and we recognise the importance of addressing these shortcomings comprehensively and transparently.

In February 2023, under section 20(5) of the Inland Fisheries Act 2010, the then Minister, Eamon Ryan, removed the IFI board on a no-fault basis, following a series of resignations that

had left it unable to function effectively. The Minister subsequently appointed Mr. Seamus Neely and Mr. Tom Barry under section 18 of the Act to perform the functions of IFI during the period in which a new board was being appointed. Their professionalism, independence and applied expertise significantly strengthened accountability, accelerated the pace of reform and stabilised organisational governance. During their term, a comprehensive independent governance review was commissioned. A key development in progressing governance reform was the appointment of a new board of Inland Fisheries Ireland in January 2024. This board brings substantial expertise in governance, environmental management, finance and public administration. Its oversight, strategic direction and commitment to the highest standards of public sector governance, along with extremely hard-working and dedicated staff, have been central to driving organisational renewal.

The governance review, completed by Ernst & Young, provided a detailed examination of governance structures, organisational culture and operational processes, and presented a clear blueprint for reform. The executive has acted swiftly and decisively on its recommendations, with robust oversight provided by the new board.

IFI has published its governance assurance framework, which demonstrates the strengthened internal controls, clarified governance roles and responsibilities, improved risk management and compliance frameworks, and enhanced oversight across the organisation. Updated procedures, revised governance documentation and clearer reporting lines are now firmly in place, supporting robust, transparent and accountable decision-making.

Inland Fisheries Ireland safeguards one of the State's most valuable natural assets: the network of rivers, streams, lakes, and coastal ecosystems that support fish populations, biodiversity and healthy aquatic communities. As the national agency with statutory responsibility for the protection, development and management of these resources, we operate within a comprehensive legislative framework.

The organisation continues to deliver a high-quality public service in fulfilling its statutory mandate. IFI has statutory responsibility for Ireland's 74,000 km of rivers and streams and 128,000 ha of lakes and exercises patrol jurisdiction along the coastline out to 12 nautical miles from the baselines. The scale and geographical breadth of our remit is extensive. IFI's dedicated staff work professionally and diligently to protect, conserve and manage Ireland's freshwater species and their habitats in an increasingly unpredictable and rapidly changing environmental landscape.

It is important to note that while IFI is a high-performing organisation, our ability to fully realise our ambitions has been constrained for many years by limited financial and human resources and updating of our statutory powers.

IFI is pleased to lead the National Barrier Mitigation Programme, NBMP, 2024–2027, funded by the Department of housing and the Department of the environment. A total of €100 million has been approved to remove or mitigate river barriers affecting species such as Atlantic salmon, European eel and lamprey. The programme aims to address 257 barriers over its lifetime, with planning and environmental consents central to delivery. The NBMP is addressing a key commitment in the Government's Water Action Plan 2024 and aligns with the EU water framework directive, the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030 and the emerging nature

restoration regulation. IFI will invest €14 million in the first 103 projects nationwide, with agreements now being issued.

The withdrawal of prosecution cases underscored the need for consistent adherence to governance, oversight and stronger internal checks. It also highlighted the requirement for clearly defined authority structures, properly recorded decision-making and stronger governance documentation. The organisation took decisive action to resolve this issue. I can provide assurance to the committee that these processes are now in place.

In relation to Aasleagh Lodge and cottages, IFI has consistently sought to identify and pursue solutions that maximise the return to the taxpayer from this unique State asset. We are satisfied that the board was kept fully informed of all expenditure associated with the complex. A board resolution has now been agreed to proceed with the sale of Aasleagh cottages. In line with this decision and following the required work to split the folio and provide separate services for the cottages, we expect the disposal process to be completed by the end of 2026. Concurrently, IFI intends to upgrade and repurpose Aasleagh Lodge to deliver enhanced public value. The proposed development includes the establishment of an international research hub for the national salmonid index catchment on the River Erriff, the provision of office accommodation and the creation of a training and education centre for IFI.

Aquatic environments are increasingly threatened by pollution, nutrient enrichment, biodiversity loss, climate change and invasive species. The spread of invasives remains a serious national concern, and without stronger legislation, adequate resources and co-ordinated enforcement, the long-term ecological and economic impacts will be significant. IFI has first-hand experience of this challenge through its long-term management of Lagarosiphon major on Lough Corrib. At the same time, IFI is actively restoring freshwater habitats by reconnecting rivers, improving spawning streams, removing migration barriers and restoring natural channel processes to build ecosystem resilience. Yet, despite these efforts, key native species continue to decline. The European eel is now critically endangered and wild salmon returns have fallen from 1.76 million in 1975 to a provisional 153,460 in 2025, a catastrophic collapse within one generation. These trends highlight the urgency of IFI's restoration and protection work and the need for strengthened cross-government action.

Looking ahead, our new statement of strategy for the period 2026 to 2030 sets a clear direction for the organisation and reflects our development into an agile, outward-looking and evidence-based fisheries environmental agency. We are operating in a period of significant ecological pressure. Climate impacts are accelerating, water quality is declining in many catchments and native fish species are increasingly vulnerable. These challenges reinforce the need for us to adapt quickly, strengthen our environmental leadership role and adopt more integrated and technology-enabled approaches across our remit.

Our team will address the committee's questions, and we will share with members any written information they request thereafter. I thank the Chair and the committee for their attention this morning.

**An Cathaoirleach:** I thank Mr. Fox for his opening statement. We will suspend the meeting for ten to 15 minutes at 12 noon and resume shortly thereafter. I will now open the floor to members. The lead speaker today is Deputy Boland. The Deputy has 15 minutes. All other

members will have ten minutes. If time permits, I will allow members back in for a second round.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** The witnesses are all very welcome, although to appear before the Committee of Public Accounts for a third consecutive year in a row following issues highlighted by the Comptroller and Auditor General is not something to be proud of. The report of the Comptroller and Auditor General and the financial statements reveal serious governance issues, internal control weaknesses and poor value-for-money practices. How many employees does IFI have?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** There are 329 permanent employees. We range from about 50 to 70 contract staff depending on external projects and the temporary staff allocation in a given year.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** When did Mr. Fox join IFI?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I joined IFI in July 2022.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Some 90% of IFI's income comes from the State. It received €33.43 million from the State in 2023. That is a huge sum. Does the taxpayer get value for that money? Who evaluates the work of IFI? Mr. Fox said the organisation is high performing. How does it demonstrate that this is the case?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We are a very high-performing organisation. We punch well above our weight in fisheries protection and environmental protection. Our results-----

**Deputy Grace Boland:** In comparison with whom is IFI punching above its weight against?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We are punching above our weight in comparison with other enforcement bodies in the area of water pollution.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** In Ireland or internationally.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** In Ireland.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Mr. Fox might give me an example of one of these bodies.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We complete in excess of 40 environmental prosecutions every year and in excess of about 70 fishery protection-----

**Deputy Grace Boland:** How many?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It is 40, and between 50 to 70 fishery protection cases on an annual basis. They would be completed in the courts.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** With whom is Mr. Fox comparing IFI when he says it punches well above its weight?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We would be comparing ourselves with the Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, county councils and other fisheries bodies on a cross-Border basis. I believe we are punching above our weight.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Has Mr. Fox documented this comparison?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No, I have not.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** It is his opinion. In terms of the prosecutions, we have 40 environmental prosecutions and 50 to 70 other prosecutions.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That is on average, yes.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** What about last year?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** In 2024, we had 99 prosecutions initiated. Some 39 of those related to environmental offences. Prosecutions concluded for fisheries offences numbered 64 and prosecutions concluded for environmental offences numbered 27.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** When Mr. Fox say concluded, what does that mean?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Finalised in court with an outcome.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Were they successful?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** There were 99 in total. Were all of those successful?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Did the IFI win all 99 cases?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes, we did.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** That was in 2024. In 2023, obviously, we had the issue regarding the delegated authority. Mr. Fox might talk to me about that. Under whose remit or under which part of the organisation should the processes of delegated authority have fallen and how were processes not put in place to ensure that prosecuting officials had valid warrants?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The prosecution officials had valid warrants. The organisation at the executive level did not have the delegated authority to approve and bring forward the prosecution. The way the functions of IFI work, they are all with the board. They have to be formally delegated to the executive.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Therefore, the warrants were not valid because the delegating authority was not there.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes, correct.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** How many cases had to be withdrawn and what was the total cost to the taxpayer?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** There were 61 cases that had to be withdrawn. The cost to date is just above €230,000. However, there are three cases being finalised that will lead to that cost being revised.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** I have a figure of €240,000.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I am sorry; it is €240,000. Excuse me.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** There is more to come, however.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Have any of the defendants taken cases against IFI for wrongful prosecution?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** None of the people IFI has prosecuted has made a claim against it.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No. The statutes of limitations work very similarly, so people had six months from when the delegation issue was identified to actually appeal the case. Nobody appealed any of the cases that were heard previous to that.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** I do not mean in terms of appealing the cases; I mean where IFI has to withdraw cases.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Where we have to withdraw cases, finalising the costs on these specific three cases is where the additional cost will come in. We have had no challenges to the prosecution that would have been pending from the 61 cases that were withdrawn.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** To what do the three cases that are pending relate?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** They relate to costs. The cases have been running since-----

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Only.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes. They have been running since 2017.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** There has been no counterclaim against IFI.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No, not that I am aware of.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Fisheries protection activity is one of IFI's core activities.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** How many patrols per year would IFI undertake?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The patrols per year would be quite significant. Total vehicle and foot patrols in 2024 would have been 49,036. If we want to break that down into hours, the types of patrols would be lake, river, sea, coastal and estuary patrols, sea bass patrols, bluefin tuna patrols and foot patrols. We also carry out a number of inspections of commercial-----

**Deputy Grace Boland:** In terms of patrols using the RIBs IFI bought, how many are carried out on average?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** For 2018, there were 60. For 2019-----

**Deputy Grace Boland:** I am sorry. How many RIBs?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** There were 60.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** How many boats does IFI have?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I am sorry, we have 12 Delta RIBs.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** IFI has 12 RIBs and there were only 60 patrols.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** In 2018, we were only taking delivery of these boats. Between 2018 and 2019, they came into service.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Mr. Fox might give me the figures for 2023 and 2024.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** There were 243 in 2023 and 206 in 2024.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Do we need 12 RIBs for that limited number of patrols?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** These vessels were originally bought for salmon protection activity. Our area of responsibility has expanded into bluefin tuna and sea bass. We are also going to have new duties, potentially in 2026, which will extend our area of responsibility to the entire marine zone right around the coast. Therefore, I would say that we do need these boats. Salmon protection is still an issue in many areas around the coast, and these boats are an essential tool in deterring people from illegal activity.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** How many patrols per year is each of these boats involved in?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We kind of aim for 20, but some of them slip below that due to staff issues and being available. However, roughly-----

**Deputy Grace Boland:** It seems very low. It is 20 per year per boat. I am a sailor. I would hope to get out at least 20 times during the summer, not on an annual basis.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That is when these boats are utilised. It is during the salmon window. When the Atlantic salmon reach our shores, these boats come into operation to protect the salmon while they are off the coast. One of the drawbacks we have with these boats is that it is like seeing a fire engine going down the road. The minute these boats are hitched up to a trailer and taken out onto the public highway, word gets around the coastal areas very quickly that we are on route. Therefore, we tend to deploy them as a deterrent and as a kind of rapid response in certain covert situations in which we use them. However, we have other tools we use. We are now using deploying jet skis-----

**Deputy Grace Boland:** What was the lowest level of use of one of these boats?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** In 2023 and 2024.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Yes.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It was 14.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** It was 14.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** In 2024, yes.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** How many people would be on that RIB?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** There would be at least three people on the RIB, and one person driving a jeep as shore backup.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** What are they doing if they are not going out on the RIB? Going out 14 times in a year is very low. I would not call that "high-performing".

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The team we are talking about is a very high-performing team. In fact, they probably generate more prosecutions than most of the districts in the country. They had a very

low staff base at the time and to operate these RIBs safely and within our SOP, they require four staff available for a boat to go to sea.

Yes, it is a low number but there are reasons for that. They would have been deployed to other areas or used other technology or equipment to do that coastal work at the time.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Does Mr. Fox think the State is getting value for money?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes, I do. This is a vessel that is needed on the coast. It can operate out to 12 miles from baselines, which is potentially 30 miles offshore. There are significant safety risks at play there and these boats are state-of-the-art to allow our staff to have single-boat patrols off the coast.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Regarding the Dormant Accounts Fund, this is a bit more historical, but I find it staggering that €1.18 million was given to the IFI. Am I right in saying that 89% of it went on administrative costs?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No, Deputy, that would not be the case.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Was it staff and administrative costs?

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** The staffing cost was purely for animators, no administration, and they delivered the project. All administration was taken up by IFI itself.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** What was this money spent on? Give me a breakdown of the €1.18 million.

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** There was €20,000 on an angling strategy, roughly €20,000 on angling activation through third parties, €139,000 on the AFA grants, which were the angling for all grants that were given out to grassroots angling organisations-----

**Deputy Grace Boland:** There were issues there with some of the grants awarded.

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** There was. It was €4,000.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** How did the IFI demonstrate good governance around that?

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** We did not particularly demonstrate good governance but we tried to ensure that the programme was delivered. We departed from the procedures, which we accept we should not have done. However, we are happy that the equipment got to the right place and is still in use. It was checked only recently.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** That is not a lot - €20,000, €20,000 and €139,000.

As regards the code of conduct for employees December 2020, under whose remit or what pillar within the IFI was this drafted?

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** A new one has been drafted.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** I should hope so.

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** It comes under finance and corporate services where the compliance team sits.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Was this under Ms Champion in 2020?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** I was not in that position in 2020.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** What position was Ms Campion in during 2020?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** Business development.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** When you look at this, you can have the most beautifully drafted codes you want, but as we have seen from issues with delegated authority, dormant accounts, money being misspent and there being over 400 vehicles but far fewer staff, there have been huge breaches of this code over time. Has there been any disciplinary action arising out of the various different breaches highlighted by the C and AG?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No, not that I am aware of.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** There is no consequence for breaching the IFI's own code.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I cannot speak to the issues that happened at that time but certainly, looking forward, we will be-----

**Deputy Grace Boland:** What guarantee can Mr. Fox give the committee that there are going to be consequences? He is talking about widening the IFI's remit-----

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I can give the committee an undertaking from the executive and the board that the oversight and controls are in place in the organisation now. That has been demonstrated through the delivery of the 11 recommendations of the EY governance review. The organisation has moved to a much stronger place in terms of governance, accountability and the processes required to deliver for the public purse and to provide value for money.

We are all aware of the issues that have occurred and are very conscious of them in doing our work. Several of the issues have been played out in the public arena, which has impacted the organisation.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** As well as confidence in the organisation.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Including the staff.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Briefly, in the time I have left, I want to ask Mr. Fox about these unsociable hours payments. What are they and when can an employee claim them?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** UHA is a payment that is made to field staff who work outside the hours of 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. or 8 p.m.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Does prior approval have to be sought?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No, it is an annual allowance. There is a rate of hours you have to achieve to get paid the unsocial hours. You get 50% up to 200 hours and 100% of the payment up to 400 hours.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Does anyone go over the amount they are supposed to work?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Pardon?

**Deputy Grace Boland:** As in, if I am supposed to work ten hours and I decide to work 20, can I still claim for the 20?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I am not aware of anybody in the organisation who would be working 20 consecutive hours. There certainly are surveillance operations that take place where significant time is put into surveillance of illegal activity, but outside of that-----

**Deputy Grace Boland:** Would people go over their annual quota of hours?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Absolutely. We have staff who work well in excess of 400 hours.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** That is not controlled or signed off in advance.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It is the nature of the work we do, Deputy. Most of the work of our fisheries staff is out of hours.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** I have worked overtime many times in my career and I have always sought permission from my managers or executives in advance of that. It seems to be uncontrolled.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I do not agree. These are fisheries enforcement officers. They are rostered in and out of work, but on occasion, when there is surveillance of illegal activity - known illegal activity - staff spend significant hours surveying those issues and trying to hold people to account. There are times where they will exceed the hours but their line managers on the ground will be aware of the hours they do. It is not just that the fisheries staff on the ground decide they will stay there for the next 20 hours. They will be in constant contact with their line managers, assistant inspectors and inspectors.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** A very tight control needs to be kept on that, to be honest with you. The organisation has demonstrated a serious lack of control over the years. To have something that does not need to be authorised, that someone can just work and claim, seems to be a repeat of this.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** To clarify, we work seven days a week, 365 days of the year. Much of our work and engagement with our stakeholders are on weekends - Saturdays and Sundays - and those are also included in the unsocial hours allowance. It is not just night-time work. It is weekend and night-time work. There are no additional payments for those times.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** What are the controls around this? I am not getting any real comfort on this.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It is rostered and fully supervised by their line managers.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** That has not worked well so far.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I do not believe there was any impact on the unsocial hours allowance in the audit.

**Deputy Grace Boland:** I mean across the organisation.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** On the other issues, I would accept that, Deputy.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** I thank the witnesses for coming in.

The importance, or potential importance, of the IFI was demonstrated by the recent Blackwater fish kill, where 32,000 fish were killed in a river already depleted in terms of fish stock, which was devastating. They were obviously killed by some form of pollution but no

source of that pollution was found, which means that nothing has been done to prevent something like that happening again. Is that a fair summary of where we are at with the Blackwater?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** What happened on the Blackwater was a significant environmental event, one of the biggest in the State's history. It has had a huge impact on local users, clubs and businesses. There is no question about it. It is something that the IFI is fully aware of and we are already engaging with the local stakeholder groups. We have plans in place to go down and do a full assessment of the catchment in 2026 to look at habitat restoration to produce more juvenile-----

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** The witnesses did not find the source of what happened.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No, we did not. As I said at the environmental committee, we are successful in about 75% of our detections. The nature of water pollution is that it can be discharged into a water body days before anybody becomes aware of it. If it is not being discharged when our officers attend on site, under the legislation, we cannot bring forward a prosecution.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** When was the first sample taken from the river?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** There were samples taken on the evening of the report but they were not processed-----

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** Sorry, what date was that?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That was 11 August.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** That was the first day the IFI was present. There were samples taken then.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** They were not taken by IFI, but by the council. We take statutory samples to prosecute an offender, so we have to locate the discharge to take that prosecution. That is the process IFI follows.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** Why does Mr. Fox think the source was not identified if he thinks it took place a week before-----

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We suspect it may have taken place and a plume may have been discharged into the water body about 72 hours before the first detection of dead fish.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** Okay. When you go through the financial stuff, it is not just a can of worms but a barrel of worms of one thing after another, including a CEO relocating and getting huge expenses, one in five members of staff having a credit card, uninsured cars and more cars than there are staff. It is a litany things but from Mr. Fox's perspective, that is in the past and before his time. He is saying that a significant change has now taken place. He does not think there is anything similar currently taking place. Is there nothing he would like to disclose or to say IFI still has this significant issue it is looking at in regard to poor governance, poor culture, not having control of spending or things like that?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** There is nothing on the spend that I am aware of that would appear in the public accounts. There is certainly one issue we are investigating that we have not closed out yet but I am not sure whether it merits discussion here. We have had a number of issues, as the

Deputy is aware from the report. On the credit card issue, we have now reduced credit cards in the organisation down to five and we will be reviewing that again in the new year.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** When did the former CEO stop getting paid?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I will ask Ms Campion to speak on that. I am not aware of that detail. It is something that would be a matter for the board, generally, from a financial side.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** Is it appropriate to deal with this? It is. The CEO left the organisation on 4 June this year.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** When did they stop working?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** They stopped working on 4 or 5 March 2024.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** They got paid while not working for a year and three months or something.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** Not for the entire time but yes.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** What sort of leave were they on? How is it the case that they were not working and they were still getting paid?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** They were on leave and the executive was not party to it. The CEO reports to the board, so all details in relation to the CEO are with the board.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** None of the witnesses know on what basis the former CEO was getting paid while not working.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No. That was a matter for the board. It is his employer.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** Was there a termination or severance payment made?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** No.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** Okay. In regard to this being before the witnesses' time, was it before their time or were they not, in some sense, in the organisation when all this stuff was happening?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I can say I was not. I started in July 2022. We are taking ownership of these issues. We have addressed them. We have put the controls in place and the governance is absolutely in place. I can confidently say the organisation is in a much better place now than it was.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** There is a reference in the C and AG report to the Workplace Relations Commission, WRC, issuing an adjudication relating to a case in December 2023 involving the suspension and subsequent dismissal of an employee. The WRC found that unfair dismissal had occurred and awarded the complainant €38,500. Did Mr. Fox have any role in that case?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I did. I undertook the appeal.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** Mr. Fox turned down the appeal, presumably, if the complainant went to the WRC.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That is correct.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** In light of the WRC decision, which was pretty strong, does Mr. Fox think he made a mistake with regard to that appeal?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No, I do not think I did. The case heard before the WRC involved much more information than the act to dismiss and the appeal information that the organisation acted upon. The primary reason we took the decision was the use of equipment while on suspension and the allowance of a taxed vehicle to be used on the public highway by a juvenile. They were the reasons.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** Mr. Fox is saying the complainant then brought more information to the WRC.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes, there was much more detail, I believe, from reading it after the fact.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** Therefore, Mr. Fox is saying that if he had been in possession of the information that was presented at the WRC he would have made a different decision on appeal stage?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No, I would not have.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** Okay, so then it is not about the information.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No but I think that ruling would describe a much bigger picture.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** Okay. Mr. Fox does not consider it problematic that IFI has an internal process which finds something and then the WRC fines and costs the public €38,500.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I accept and understand where the Deputy is coming from on this but my view is that there are so many tragedies on the road with the misuse of vehicles and accidents. Allowing a juvenile to use a State asset on a public highway, I believe, is gross misconduct.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** Okay.

In relation to one other issue, in June 2021 an IFI staff member requested funding for the completion of a two-year master of business administration, MBA. The MBA course was paid for them and cost us about €20,000. They were not in a management position but the business case for it was that in the future, they might be in a management position. Is that staff member still with IFI?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes. That staff member is still with us.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** Are they playing a management role?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I can report they actually are. They are an assistant principal, AP, standard in the organisation and doing an excellent job.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** It seems like a peculiar situation whereby someone - I am casting no aspersions on this individual and I do not know who they are - is able to get an expensive course paid for that does not have any immediate relevance to their actual current job and there is nothing to stop them. It is good to hear they are still there and we are getting the benefit of that but they could have gone off somewhere else and we would have effectively paid for their training. Are there controls put in place to ensure something like that will not happen again?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes. At the time, you had to put forward a business case to make a case for the training. I can advise the committee that the training was reviewed by the head of HR and the learning and development manager at the time. I am advised that a verbal commitment was given. There is email evidence to say that the approval to pay a deposit happened in July but due to issues with authorisations on online payments between the app and the credit card of the particular person who was approving it, that did not happen until September. That is my information on the issue.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** Consultancy costs of almost €2 million are disclosed. What is that? What sort of consultancy is being paid for?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I will pass to the head of finance and corporate services on that issue, if the Deputy does not mind.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** We use quite a lot of consultancy. I have a breakdown for 2023. Business improvement was €128,000, capital €97,000, consultant engineers €159,000, eel survey €26,000, environmental consultants €262,000, financial €105,000, HR and pensions €120,000 and legal €918,000, with legal shown separately in our accounts as well. Medical services were €22,800. Marketing, which is more like promotion and communications, was €76,000. Property and planning was €47,000 and veterinary services €24,000.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** To finish, €1 million on legal fees or close to it.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** We are a regulatory body.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** Yes. This is paying for prosecutions and stuff, effectively, like paying for a senior counsel or whoever.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** Yes but in 2023 we had a judicial review going on, for which €416,000 of an entire €656,000 bill was paid.

**Deputy Paul Murphy:** Okay. I thank Ms Campion.

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** I thank the witnesses for joining us today. I want to move on to dormant accounts funding. Between 2019 and 2021, IFI received over €1.1 million, which led to an internal review in 2022. This saw IFI having to pay back €28,000 to the Dormant Accounts Fund. Have there been any additional reviews since 2021 and has IFI had to pay any funding back since then?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The head of finance and corporate services can correct me here but I am not aware of any other areas where we had to pay back funding we had received.

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** Has IFI done any additional reviews since 2021 on the spending of this funding?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We delivered a go fishing fund in 2024 and 2025 through the dormant accounts process. We received a satisfactory audit with three - I will hand over to Ms Campion.

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** Could she please be very brief?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** We did not have to pay back any further funds. We did a further audit, on one grant, of the angling for all fund, which was for €4,000. It found that there were

weaknesses in our evaluation, but no moneys were paid back. We since received €500,000 in 2024 from the Dormant Accounts Fund for structures, stands and angling access.

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** Could Ms Campion elaborate on the weaknesses that were identified?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** In angling for all, it was one particular club, which was a new club when it applied, and we awarded it money but afterwards we realised that it did not have a bank account so it was facilitated in drawing down the award through the national governing body. As a result, the national governing body did the procurement, purchased the goods, drew down the money and then transferred the goods to the club in question.

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** The internal audit in 2022 highlighted that in some cases the expenditure was not really going on what the funding was designed for. In Ms Campion's opinion, was any angling organisation negatively affected by the management of these funds?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** I do not think so. What we were trying to do was get the money to the grassroots so that people could deliver different programmes themselves. The money that was returned was €28,800 in total. It related to a stand we had at the ploughing match, in the Government of Ireland stand, which was for general access to make it open to everybody to be able to take up angling.

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** Does Ms Campion feel that any clubs lost out through the way IFI managed the fund?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** No.

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** I am going to go back to 2018. There was an announcement by the then Minister of State, Deputy Canney, that €70,000 from the Dormant Accounts Fund would be awarded to the Angling Council of Ireland, which was never disbursed to it. Does Ms Campion know why?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I will take that one.

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** Yes, please. Again, could Mr. Fox be brief?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes. Some €20,000 of the dormant accounts funding that was being progressed at that stage was for the marketing and development of packs for new entrants to angling. The sum of €50,000 was split between the National Coarse Fishing Federation of Ireland, NCFFI, and the Angling Council of Ireland. The National Coarse Fishing Federation took up the funding of approximately €19,000 and the Angling Council of Ireland did not. It is on record at the previous hearing of the Committee of Public Accounts. A statement was made that it was committed to one particular organisation and the assistant secretary at the time confirmed that no explicit agreement was in place with that organisation.

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** There was an announcement by the then Minister of State of €70,000 in funding but no official commitment or agreement was in place for-----

**Mr. Barry Fox:** For one organisation to receive the money.

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** -----one to receive it. The Minister of State made an announcement for a headline and there was no intention to follow it through in this instance. Is it not the case that there was a service level agreement, SLA, with the Angling Council of Ireland for €70,000?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I am not aware of an SLA for the €70,000 with the ACI.

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** There was a service level agreement, of which I have a copy. It was not followed through and then the distribution process moved from an SLA to an etender process. Despite the SLA being for a value of €70,000, the etender process for the distribution of this fund of €70,000 that was earmarked by the Minister of State only advertised for €50,000. There seems to be a discrepancy not only between the Minister of State making the announcement to one club – that is a different issue for the Minister of State to account for – but in the total amount that was agreed in the SLA and what was available later on in the etender.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I will ask Ms Campion to answer that question as she was involved in it at the time.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** The announcement made by the Minister of State said that IFI works with AFYDI, ACI and other organisations. The award to IFI at the time was for €20,000 and €50,000. The sum of €20,000 was for a national angling strategy and €50,000 for novice angler activation.

The SLA the Deputy mentioned was in discussion with the ACI previous to all of that but it was never signed off or agreed upon. The €70,000 from the Dormant Accounts Fund is a completely separate issue. Of that, €20,000 went to the angling strategy and it was decided by the board and the Minister at the time that the €50,000 would be distributed in a fair manner through the etenders process.

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** Am I correct that the only organisation awarded that funding at the time was the NCFFI?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That is correct.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** No, I am sorry. The award was made to both the NCFFI and the ACI, but the ACI turned down the award on the basis of intellectual property.

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** Did the NCFFI at the time have its accreditation programme in place? Was it qualified to deliver the tender specifications that it was awarded?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** The NCFFI was part of the ACI up to pretty much before the applications were made, and they split, which is not unusual in angling clubs or organisations.

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** Did it have its accreditation in place?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** It was a national governing body.

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** So at the time of being awarded that funding in 2021, it had its accreditation programme in place.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** I believe so. It was a national governing body with-----

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** Sport Ireland confirmed in February 2021 that it did not.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** I will have to check that for the Deputy.

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** I would appreciate if Ms Campion could do that and clarify it to the committee.

I am tight on time but in my last couple of minutes of this round I would like to raise some local issues pertaining to where I come from. There are concerns about the fish count on the River Boyne being inaccurate. The counters are placed at Blackcastle in Navan, County Meath, where the river is quite wide. Is there a case to move the counters to a narrower part of the River Boyne to ensure accuracy of the fish count? Is Mr. Fox concerned about that in any way?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No, I am not concerned about it. For us to establish a new fish counter on the Boyne would involve us putting in a crump weir or something similar in the river, which would impede protected species from migrating through the river, so it is not a policy I would advise pursuing.

To put it in context, in particular around salmon, our national conservation limit for salmon is 258,414. We are now sitting at 155,000, so while some rivers still have surpluses, most of the rivers in the State are under the conservation limit. There are a lot of issues around the management advice for 2026, but it needs to be taken in the context that salmon are in rapid decline. There are a lot of reasons for that. We do not blame anglers or commercial fishermen, but we have to take action to try to arrest the decline and that is what we are trying to do. Unfortunately, the Boyne is well below its conservation limit. There are merger issues in the Boyne. Some 53% of it is arterially drained, so production is lower than it should be for a catchment of that size. In recent years, we have been making significant investment in the Boyne to restore the habitats in the river. Hopefully, in the coming years we will see a reverse in the decline and an increase in fish.

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** The annual report states that in June 2023 there was illegal net fishing in the River Boyne Estuary at Baltray. Somebody was caught and fined for that. Have there been more instances of illegal net fishing going on in the river since then? Could Mr. Fox briefly comment on whether he sees a time when licensed draft net fishermen will be allowed to operate on the river or other rivers that they traditionally fished, or are those days gone?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** They are certainly reducing for a number of geographical areas around the country. There are potentially seven areas where the commercial draft net fishing licences will be removed in 2026 if the Minister accepts the advice. The view at the time when the high seas drift-net fishing was removed was that there had to be an equal share of the stock between the commercial fishermen and the recreational anglers. If we move to a position where there are surplus stocks above the conservation limits in any catchment in the country, we would have look at how it would be shared out again in the future.

**Deputy Joanna Byrne:** I thank Mr. Fox.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Our next questioner is Deputy Kenny.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** I welcome the witnesses. I thank the C and AG for a comprehensive report, which I appreciate. I have a "Yes" or "No" question. Is the role of the deputy CEO set out in statute?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Was there a previous deputy CEO?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** There were three previous deputy CEOs on a six-month basis. There was a recruitment undertaken in September for a three-year deputy CEO as the board wanted to ensure that there was longevity and consistency to it.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Very good.

I wish to focus on the uninsured vehicles. Following a road traffic accident in August 2021, the IFI discovered that 15 hired vehicles, including the vehicle involved in the accident, had been uninsured for a period. All the uninsured vehicles had been hired between 1 June and 27 July 2021. The IFI subsequently changed its insurance arrangements so that its vehicles no longer have to be insured on an individual basis. With the vehicle that was involved in the crash in Donegal, An Garda Síochána would have been involved. I have another "Yes" or "No" question. Was there any false documentation provided to An Garda Síochána in relation to this?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We did not knowingly present any, but the insurance certificate that was presented was not a valid insurance certificate. We know that now.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** On 6 July 2023, why did the ex-CEO, Francis O'Donnell, say at the public accounts committee that he knew on the day of the accident?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I do not have an answer for that. We have a comprehensive timeline of the events and when we were made aware by our insurers that they were not accepting liability.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** When was the IFI made aware by the insurance company?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I will pass this to the field services manager, Mr. Cusack, to give the Deputy that update.

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** We were made aware of this in mid-November of that year.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** The IFI had a six-month legal obligation to make An Garda Síochána and the person who was in the accident - the staff member of the IFI - aware of this. It did not.

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** I am not aware of that statutory obligation.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** The IFI did not make gardaí aware.

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** We did not engage with gardaí on that.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Why?

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** I am not aware that we had the obligation that the Deputy referred to.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** The IFI allowed a staff member to receive a summons from An Garda Síochána in relation to no insurance even though the IFI was acutely aware of the fact that the vehicle was not insured.

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** My understanding is that the employee may have received a summons but not at the time when we became aware of the event as being uninsured.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Will Mr. Cusack go into that in further detail?

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** While we notified the insurers of the incident on the day of the incident in August, it was in mid-November when they came back to the IFI and confirmed that there was a declare nature of the liability on the policy.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Was Mr. Cusack employed by the IFI at that stage?

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** Yes.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Why did the ex-CEO Francis O'Donnell, at a previous public accounts committee meeting, inform the committee and a colleague, Deputy Alan Dillon - now Minister of State - that he knew on the day of the accident that the cars were uninsured?

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** I cannot detail why he was expressing that opinion. He may have misunderstood.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** That is not an opinion. It was a fact. The car was uninsured.

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** The fact that the car was uninsured became a fact to the IFI in mid-November of 2021. There was engagement with the insurer-----

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** That is incorrect. Francis O'Donnell, who was the ex-CEO, made the committee aware that he knew on the day of the accident. Official documentation was provided to the IFI on 16 November that the car was uninsured but Mr. O'Donnell informed the committee on 6 July 2023 that the car uninsured. He knew on the day of the accident.

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** I cannot second guess his thought process at that time. He may have confused the declaration of the vehicle with whether it was insured or not.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** When the IFI received the official documentation on 16 November 2021 from the insurers, why was it not produced to An Garda Síochána?

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** We were not aware we had a legal obligation to do so.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Of course, the IFI had a legal obligation to do so. It allowed a staff member to receive a summons. There was no mention of the IFI on the summons. That is a fact.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I am not aware of the details of the summons but I am not sure it is to do with insurance.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** It is.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I have never had sight of that.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Of course, it is to do with insurance.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I have not had sight of it.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** On 16 November 2021, official communication was given to the IFI that the car was uninsured.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** The IFI allowed a staff member to receive a summons from An Garda Síochána. It did not make the staff member aware of that until October 2022, which was a year after the accident and nearly a year after the IFI received the official documentation. It allowed him to receive that summons. There was no mention of the IFI on the summons because he was the driver of the car. The IFI waited a year to inform a staff member that the car was uninsured and never told An Garda Síochána.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** For clarification, I am not aware of that summons. I do not know if anyone in the organisation is.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Is Mr. Fox aware of the fact that former Minister, Eamon Ryan, had an external investigation into this? Those results were provided at the beginning of 2025. Those findings were provided to the chair at the board of the IFI at the beginning of 2025.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I assume the Deputy is speaking to a protected disclosure, which would not be something that we would have detail of.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** The findings of the external investigation Eamon Ryan instigated were issued to the board of the IFI at the beginning of 2025.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I can confirm that I have had no sight of that investigation or the findings from it.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Mr. Fox has had no sight of findings. The Department commissioned an external investigation. As deputy CEO and now head of the IFI, Mr. Fox had no sight of the findings from that report.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Correct.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Why is that?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I cannot answer that question. I am not aware of why it has not been provided to the executive. That is as much information on that element that I can give the Deputy.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** That does not make any sense. There was an external investigation commissioned by the former Minister, Eamon Ryan, in relation to information that he had received regarding false documentation provided to An Garda Síochána in relation to an uninsured vehicle. Those findings were produced to the Garda Commissioner and the board of the IFI at the beginning of 2025 and Mr. Fox, as the head of the IFI, is unaware of those findings.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I have not seen those findings.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** That is unbelievable. The IFI allowed a staff member to receive a summons in relation to an uninsured vehicle. It received official confirmation on 16 November 2021 that the car was uninsured. Despite the former CEO, Francis O'Donnell, notifying the public accounts committee on 6 July 2023 that he knew on the day of the accident that the vehicle was uninsured, the member of staff received a summons after 16 November 2021. The fact of the matter is that the IFI did not produce that documentation to An Garda Síochána or the staff member. The witnesses are now saying that they did not understand that there was a legal obligation. Of course, there is a legal obligation. False documentation was provided to

the staff member who then in turn provided it to An Garda Síochána. What we ultimately have now is a staff member of the IFI - reading between the lines - being thrown under the bus for this.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I can clarify that as far as we are aware the summons was not for no insurance.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Mr. Fox is wrong.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I am just stating our position.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** There were two summonses. One of them is still before the courts in relation to dangerous driving. I will not discuss that because it is before the courts. The second one is in relation to the uninsured vehicle where there is no mention of the IFI. The mention is in relation to the staff member.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We will follow that up but we are not aware-----

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** That external investigation, where the findings were given to the board of the IFI, speaks wonders to me. It showcases the culture within the IFI that it has not brought that to Mr. Fox's attention and that it is not following up on an external investigation commissioned by the former Minister. Those results and findings would have been given to Mr. Fox by the new Minister. The fact of the matter is that those findings are now on the desk of the Garda Commissioner. At the same time, the ex-CEO resigned as soon as those findings were given. I will not read between the lines because I do not want to make any allegations, but I am certain - I would have expected an answer on this today - that within those findings, there is evidence of this staff member being absolutely thrown under the bus by the IFI.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I can absolutely give the Deputy a guarantee that that was not the case. The IFI engaged with the staff member very proactively-----

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** No, Mr. Fox cannot say it was not the case.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I have read the-----

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** No, Mr. Fox cannot, because it was the case. The IFI was officially informed on 16 November 2021 that the car was uninsured. It chose not to inform that member of staff or An Garda Síochána, and allowed that staff member to receive two summonses, one for dangerous driving, which is before the courts, so I will not mention it again, and the second for the uninsured vehicle. The IFI chose a year later to inform that staff member. That is a matter of fact.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I will take that in two parts. The first part is that I expect - I could be wrong on this - that the investigation undertaken by the Department was a PD, so that is not something that IFI would have been made aware of. On the second part of it, I will go and look at the file. I will try to get as much information as I can, but in relation to the issue-----

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** What I want Mr. Fox to do is to go back to the board and say, "I am the head of the IFI. Why was I not informed at the start of this year that the findings from the external investigation were produced by the Department?" That is what I would say. If Mr. Fox wants to create a culture of proper governance, he needs to be leading this organisation properly. What I certainly believe, because I know from experience on this, and Mr. Fox knows

that I know from experience, because I am a Mallow man and I know about the revelations that are ongoing within the IFI, is that this needs to be absolutely built up once again from the ground up because the IFI is an organisation that is distrusted by the public. Hopefully, I will have a second opportunity to come in.

**An Cathaoirleach:** With the agreement of the committee, we will correspond with the Department to see if we can obtain copies of those findings. I am surprised he is not aware of that information. I ask him to engage with the board and furnish us with any documentation related to it. I call Deputy Geoghegan.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** I thank all of the witnesses. To continue on from Deputy Kenny's line of questioning, before he came into this meeting, what was Mr. Fox's state of knowledge on the summons that he mentioned?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I was aware of the first issue that the Deputy mentioned, not the one on insurance.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Somebody handed Mr. Fox a piece of paper during that. It was handed to Ms Campion and then read to Mr. Fox. Where is that information flowing from?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That was the issue that the Deputy had highlighted that is before the courts.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Was Mr. Fox just being given that piece of paper to remind us of the information that he already knew? What was the purpose behind him being handed that piece of paper in response to the questions from Deputy Kenny?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I was aware of that issue. I was not aware that it was still before the courts.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** I am just trying to understand why Mr. Fox was handed a piece of paper by the gentleman behind him, which was read by Ms Campion. Mr. Fox put on his glasses and he then read it into the record. Why did he do that? What is the chain of command here? Why is Mr. Fox saying that now? Initially, he said he did not know anything about the summonses or about the information. Why is he now asserting that point? Mr. Fox then went on to say that he can “guarantee”. He was very firm, even though he did not know anything about this. There are contradictory things happening in real time here. I want to understand why the piece of paper was handed to Ms Campion. What was the motivation for that piece of paper being handed over? Why did Mr. Fox read it out straightaway, with his glasses on, as a response to the line of questioning from Deputy Kenny?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** For clarity, there is no hidden agenda here with this. I did not think it was appropriate to speak about a criminal matter before the PAC. This is not a matter for the IFI, which is the first issue we discussed. I am not aware of any issue with a prosecution coming forward for no insurance. We were not aware of that as an organisation.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Is that Mr. Cusack's understanding?

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** Yes, that is my understanding.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Is there anybody here from the IFI who has anything more material to say in relation to anything that Deputy Kenny has just said? Is there anybody from the IFI sitting at the back, or here in front of me, including Mr. Cusack, with anything more material that they are aware of in relation to the matters that Deputy Kenny has raised?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No, I do not think so.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** You have no information.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Ms McGinty is here on behalf of the Department. What can she say in respect of the report that Deputy Kenny is referring to?

**Ms Catherine McGinty:** I am not aware that there was a report either. As Mr. Fox has mentioned, I would assume it is a protected disclosure. Protected disclosures are investigated within a dedicated unit of the Department. They are done externally. That ties in with the external investigation. We would not see those reports. We would not know what the investigation is about. I can try to follow up but I suspect that the level of information in relation to it would be quite limited in what we could provide.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** The accounts dealt with by the Comptroller and Auditor General probably postdate a lot of these issues. Is there anything he can say in that respect from the board minutes he has reviewed?

**Mr. Seamus McCarthy:** No, we are not aware of the particular report. Obviously, if it was a report that was delivered in January 2025, we would be reviewing that perhaps as part of the 2024 financial statements audit, which is not yet completed. It is certainly a matter that we will consider in that context.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** I thank Mr. McCarthy.

Does Mr. Fox attend board meetings?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I do, yes.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Was Mr. Fox in attendance at the board meeting in the January referred to?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I believe I would have been, yes.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Mr. Fox has no recollection of these issues being raised at any board level meeting that he has attended.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No. There are closed sessions for the board. Issues like this, particularly if they are of the nature of a PD, would be discussed in closed session. If something came in from the Department, I would expect that is where it would have been discussed, not at an open board meeting with the executive.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** I will move on to other matters. It sounds like that is as much information as we can get here today.

Mr. Fox made a very grand statement in response to Deputy Boland that, as an organisation, the IFI is punching above its weight. When did it start punching above its weight?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** What I am referring to there is the activities of our environmental officers and protection officers on the ground. They work extremely hard. They are very committed to the environment and to the protection of our native species. They go above and beyond on a daily basis to deliver that role.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** When Deputy Boland pushed Mr. Fox on this, he actually referred to the enforcement activity as demonstrating why IFI is punching above its weight. Now, he is saying it is punching above its weight because of the work that its environmental officers do on the ground. Which is it?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It is all enforcement.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** The investigations would lead to the enforcement.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** The IFI threw a lot of punches that were not legally authorised a number of years ago in terms of prosecutions that had to be withdrawn. That is really why I am asking the question. Over 60 prosecutions, roughly, had to be withdrawn. Is there a comparable prosecutorial authority in this country that had to withdraw 60 prosecutions because of legal deficiencies?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes, it has happened on a number of occasions through the years.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** So the IFI is a less bad version of other bad prosecutorial authorities.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** In my opening statement, I clearly accepted that mistakes were made and the delegations were not in place. We have accepted that and we have absolutely addressed it.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** I am going to go back to Mr. Fox's statement that IFI is punching above its weight. When did that start? When did the clean bill of health begin? Can he put a year or a month on it? When did the punching above its weight by the IFI begin? When was the page turned? When did all of that start?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I think what I was referring to was our staff on the ground and the service they deliver. The Deputy may not agree but I think the issues we have experienced have been governance and control issues internally. Our staff, who are the absolute engine of the organisation, have been punching above their weight for many years, and they had no part to play in the issues that we are discussing here today.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** When Mr. Fox says they have been punching above their weight for many years, what blame does he assign to the executive in respect of this? We all acknowledge the governance issues, but individual decisions taken by people who worked in the executive triggered a lot of these problems. Surely Mr. Fox is not waving his hands at that, or suggesting that employees or management had no responsibility to bear in respect of all of this.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No. These were senior management and middle management decisions, individuals within the organisation. Organisation-wide, we have excellent staff.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** There was a litany of issues. It was not just one or two.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** There was an accumulation. For Mr. Fox to speak of the staff in the glowing terms he is using seems very contradictory to the comprehensive reports that

have been produced in respect of the litany of issues. Does Mr. Fox see where I am coming from?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I see where the Deputy is coming from, but the staff that IFI have are delivering an excellent service for the taxpayer and are doing a very important job. My opinion is-----

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Just on the point made about the taxpayer and the IFI's enforcement activity, am I right in saying that the average fine on the lower end is approximately €400?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** At the lower end, it can range from €250 to €1,000. Legal costs are sometimes awarded.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Are legal costs approximately €4,000?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** They can be anything from €1,500 to €4,000.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** There is almost a ten to one ratio between the legal costs IFI is paying and the fines that are being dished out for a lot of the cases taken to enforcement.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Absolutely.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Is that an efficient use of taxpayers' money?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I think it is holding to people to account for environmental damage and breaking the law. The fines certainly do not fit the crimes. That is something we are working with the Department to resolve.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** The fines do not fit the crimes. They should be charged €4,000 to match the legal costs.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I think some of the environmental crimes being committed at the moment should all be dealt with in the higher courts. There should be a polluter pays principle applied where they actually pay for the damage they cause.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** The IFI can only exercise the statutory powers it currently has. I hear the point that Mr. Fox is making in respect of that, but it is not really our function here. In terms of the powers the IFI does have, are there not better ways that it could impose fines while not subjecting the organisation to such high and exorbitant legal costs?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We have a fixed-charge penalty system in place that addresses those minor offences, but quite a lot of the time those fines remain unpaid and we have to proceed to court anyway. That is where there certainly is not value for money. We issue a fixed-charge penalty notice for a fine of €150, it comes back unpaid and we have to bring forward legal proceedings.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** I want to close out on a value-for-money issue, and I acknowledge that this is a legacy issue. Is it correct to say, and Deputy Murphy talked about it a little bit, that an IFI employee was funded to the amount of €20,000 for an MBA?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It was originally €20,000. I think it was reduced dramatically.

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** It was €27,000 down to €20,000.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It was €27,000 down to €20,000. It was not the only masters degree that was funded through the organisation. There have been a number over the years.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** My understanding from the report was that this was only type of MA that was funded by the IFI. Is Mr. Fox telling me that other members of staff received funding?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It was the only one funded in that year.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** How many MAs or MBAs to the amount of €20,000 have been funded by the IFI over its lifetime?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I will find the answer and give it to the Deputy. It is here somewhere.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** In those cases, were the people who received funding at a management level?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** As these are historical, I do not have the people's grades. However, nine people received funding for MAs between 2018 and 2025.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Were those nine people at management level?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I will have to come back to the Deputy in writing on this matter. I do not have the people's details; I just have the high-level figures. I would expect that a lot of them came from the research side of the house and they would have been doing scientific qualifications.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** So they were not doing MBAs.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** They would not have been doing MBAs.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** None of those nine were MBAs?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I cannot honestly say that to the Deputy, but I doubt it.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Has the IFI funded any MBAs since it funded one for a staff member at a non-managerial level?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Not that I am aware of.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Was that a wrong decision to fund that individual's MBA?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I do not think so. The individual submitted a business case. It went to HR. It was approved. There were timing issues in the payment of the moneys to the college, but under our processes, any staff member in the IFI is entitled to apply for funding to progress in the organisation and get further education. That is part of our policy. I do not think it was the wrong the decision.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Right now, other staff members could conceivably get funded to the amount of €20,000 for an MBA, if they applied.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** They could make an application and the application would be assessed on its merits. If it provided value to the organisation, it would certainly be considered.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** I note from Mr. Fox's opening statement that there has been a catastrophic collapse in the salmon yields and salmon returns. There has been a catastrophic collapse in the public's trust in this organisation over the past three years. Mr. Fox also said that the organisation has been constrained for many years by limited financial resources. It is very hard to marry that type of statement with so many examples of the misuse of public funds. It is very hard to see how there have been constraints placed on an organisation that in many circumstances misspent or misappropriated funds in the way that IFI did.

I am going to first focus on some of the rulings from the WRC. The C and AG report refers to an unfair dismissal at a cost of €38,500 plus legal fees of €38,000. The WRC report stated that the employee was targeted from the beginning and that the CEO attempted to surreptitiously influence the adjudicator by attempting to speak to him off record. The WRC also stated that it could see no reason for the suspension and that it seemed that the employee was to be taken out by hook or by crook. How long did that employee work for IFI?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I do not have the exact figure, but it was in excess of 30 years.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** It was 37 years. Imagine being taken out by hook or by crook after 37 years. At the previous public accounts committee, the former CEO spoke at length about major fraud investigations and an imminent prosecution. What is the status of that fraud investigation and prosecution?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I am advised that a file was sent to the DPP and the DPP elected not to progress a prosecution.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** According to the former CEO, prosecutions were imminent. The DPP, however, decided there was nothing to be done.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That is my information.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** An anonymous letter was received and it was acted on by the executive within four days. Was there any internal investigation done before this person was suspended?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I was not in the organisation when this happened. I will ask if Ms Campion is aware of anything.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** I do not have any idea.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Mr. Fox and Ms Campion both signed this man's dismissal letter.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We signed the dismissal on appeal.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Mr. Fox should not try to portray that he is unaware of the situation.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I am fully aware of the situation but I am not aware of the letter-----

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** What internal review took place? It was one anonymous letter and four days later a man was suspended.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I will clarify what I can. The appeal is undertaken on the information that was used to make the decision to dismiss. With regard to the letter the Deputy is referring to,

I am not aware of that letter. I was not in the organisation when that issue arose. I came into the organisation in July 2022.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** The anonymous letter began the dismissal process.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That process was ongoing when I joined the organisation.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Mr. Fox got no handover as to what the letter contained.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** How could Mr. Fox fairly adjudicate on an appeal if he did not have the information to hand?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We adjudicate on the appeal. The information that was used for the dismissal is what we would use in our appeal. We would not have used any of the external communications that came in. I do not know what was in that letter. Ms Campion may have detail on that.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** The points of appeal were on the breach of IFI policies and procedures, mitigating circumstances, the severity of sanction and breach of confidentiality throughout the process.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** A man was dismissed because of an allegation made in an anonymous letter. Mr. Fox and Ms Campion co-signed the appeal decision, although the WRC ultimately found that there was no reason for suspension in the first place. Mr. Fox and Ms. Campion say that they did not have sight of the letter. I cannot understand this. How could they have made an informed decision?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I addressed this issue before the Deputy came in. I made a very informed decision on my reasoning for upholding the dismissal. It was allowing-----

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** I was here for that.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** -----a juvenile to be on the public highway in a State vehicle without tax or insurance or being old enough to drive the vehicle. That was my rationale for the decision.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** That is a complete separate incident to the reason. That is a really important point to make.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** IFI has stood over this decision. I cannot understand this. The *Daily Mail* reported that the former CEO described the WRC's ruling as reckless. Does Mr. Fox agree with that description?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Can the Deputy repeat that?

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** The former CEO described the WRC's ruling as reckless. The *Daily Mail* reported that the former CEO described the WRC's ruling as a reckless decision.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That is the former CEO's opinion, not mine.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Does Mr. Fox agree?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I did not form an opinion on it, to be quite frank about it.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Mr. Fox had to have done so. He signed the letter.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I did not form an opinion on the WRC ruling but I certainly did not think it was reckless.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** A man's life was ruined. Would Mr. Fox not apologise to this man? If he is saying he had no sight of what started this process, then surely to God, an apology is the minimum that is owed. The WRC found in his favour. He had 37 years of service to the organisation.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I have laid out the information I used to make my decision and I stand over that decision.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** In a separate WRC ruling this year, it was stated that a former employee was asked to bring a child down the town for an ice cream. Whose child was that?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Sorry?

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Down the town for an ice cream. It was stated in a WRC ruling.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** A WRC ruling about bringing a child down town for ice cream? I am not aware of that. Could the Deputy put a bit of context to that? Where was it?

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** In a separate WRC ruling this year, evidence was given that a staff member had been asked to mind somebody else's child while a meeting was taking place.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I am not aware of any staff member minding somebody's child when a staff meeting was taking place and I am not aware of the detail the Deputy is talking about. The Deputy maybe needs to elaborate on that.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Is anybody else aware of what I am speaking about this morning?

I will move on to the failed prosecutions. The former CEO called them a glitch and a slight technicality. Does Mr. Fox agree with that terminology?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It would not be the wording I would use, Deputy.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** We have spoken a lot about who was around at the time when the failed prosecutions took place. When did the first of the 61 failed prosecutions take place?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The first of the prosecutions withdrawn was in 2017. The case was ongoing from 2017, so it was live cases at the time that were withdrawn. It was not the actual date they started. It was ones that were before the courts and 61 were live at that time.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** The report we have read suggests that the bulk of those was from 2023 until now, where warrants were not executed.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No, the warrants were issued and they were before the courts but they had not been finalised, so that is the reason they had to be withdrawn.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Whose responsibility is it to finalise those warrants?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It would require the hearing to be completed in the court and the judge to make a ruling, so it is with the Judiciary. It is the timing to get those before the courts.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** No, but to finalise the warrants, who signs off on those from an IFI perspective?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The warrants are issued by our panel solicitors, so they act on behalf of IFI.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Who instructs the panel solicitors?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It is a process of approvals that goes through the organisation, so ultimately I would sign off on the prosecution. The authority to prosecute would come from the head of operations.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** For the 61 cases, where did this fall down? At whose role did it fall down?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It fell down at the board level where the delegation of authority from the IFI - the entity - was not delegated to the executive to give us the authority to actually approve prosecutions, so it was-----

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Mr. Fox went to the board asking approval of 61 cases and it would not give that approval.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No. The delegation of authority is very simple. The board actually delegates the function to the executive. That process had not occurred to allow the prosecutions to be formally authorised to go through the courts.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Why not?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The board had not signed the delegation order to allow that to happen.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Why?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It was the board that was in place before this board, so I do not know. They were out of the organisation by the time we discovered this.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** I want to ask a quick question about Aasleagh Lodge. What is the valuation on the property now?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I will ask Ms Campion to give the Deputy the figure.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** The current net book value is €509,846.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Was the property ever valued at €1 million?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** I think back in 2017 we had valuations of around that. I was not involved back then, so I would have to check the records but I think so, yes.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** What would happen on a site that would see it devalue by €500,000 between 2017 and now?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** Sorry, what would happen?

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** What would happen a site to cause this. Had works taken place? Why is the valuation of the house now half what it was in 2017?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** Okay, so the valuation is a separate, independent valuation. What I am giving the Deputy is the net book value in our accounts, which is cost, less depreciation, since we bought it.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Fair enough, but is Ms Campion saying that the intention is to sell?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** No. We were intending to sell back in 2017 but we are not now.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** There is no intention to sell now.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** There has been a board decision to sell the cottages.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Was rental income ever accrued from the cottages to the IFI?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** Yes. There is a long history to this, as the Deputy has probably seen through the various sets of accounts. The IFI used to manage Aasleagh Lodge and cottages as bed and breakfast accommodation, for which it took rental income. In 2015 the board made the decision to no longer operate them itself and to lease them out. A commercial bidder won the tender and took over the lodge but gave it up after a year because they were not making money. It was subsequently offered to all staff, pending sale in 2017. An agreement was put in place at that stage which was thought would be finished very soon when the building was sold but it actually ran on to 2021.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Did the board ever try to sell the house but found itself unable to do so because of lease agreements that it was unaware of?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** No. As I understand it, the lease agreement had a ten-week notice clause in it, so it could be pulled at any stage. That was part of the idea of having it there on a short-term basis, so that it could be relinquished very quickly.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** I thank Ms Campion and Mr. Fox.

**An Cathaoirleach:** I note that Deputy Farrelly raised a number of issues around the WRC and different rulings. I appreciate that the witnesses are here to discuss the financial accounts and the special report from the C and AG. The witnesses might furnish the committee with a note in relation to the items Deputy Farrelly raised relating to the WRC. We will now suspend the meeting for ten to 15 minutes.

*Sitting suspended at 12.07 p.m. and resumed at 12.26 p.m.*

**An Cathaoirleach:** Mr. Fox wants to correct the record on a number of items that he made reference to earlier.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** First, between 2018 and 2025, it was five master's, not nine. I was reading from a sheet. It is five, instead of nine.

To answer Deputy Kenny's question on the report from the Department, there was a report from the Department that came in in February of this year. The audit and risk committee, ARC, was tasked with considering the findings from it. They accepted the first two, which was that IFI had no insurance on the vehicle. They refuted the position that IFI knowingly allowed an employee to present insurance to An Garda Síochána. That is the position. Apologies, I did not have that information.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Thanks for that. I am sure there will be some questions stemming from that. Our next questioner is Deputy Dolan.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** Gabhaim buíochas le IFI for being here today. I want to ask about the former CEO's overclaimed subsistence. Paragraph 6.3 of the C and AG's report highlights this. Did the CEO have approval from the board to change his contractual base?

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** Not in writing.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** Was there verbal agreement between the former CEO and the board?

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** I can only tell the Deputy what I know. There was a letter written from the head of HR to the CEO saying his base had changed. The two chairs signed the CEO's expenses using his new base.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** Was the board aware of his new base? They might have signed the expenses approving the amount but were they aware of that change of location?

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** Our expense claim says where your base is and where you go to and come from so if you were claiming subsistence for an overnight in Dublin then that would mean that your base is not in Dublin.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** What was the total figure that was overclaimed?

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** I think it was seven thousand and something euro. I have to get out the report, sorry.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** That is okay.

**Mr. Seamus McCarthy:** The total of subsistence that was claimed in respect of trips to headquarters in Dublin is €7,972.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** That was from the new base. If this was an overpayment and this CEO has left the organisation, was any of that money recovered?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes. The section 18 appointees that were brought into the organisation did a review of the CEO's expenses. They backdated a repayment to the time they started in the organisation and a payment of €1,041.08 was repaid.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** Why was only €1,041 repaid given there was an overpayment of €7,972?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I am not aware. That would have been a matter for the section 18s and the CEO at the time, unless Ms Champion has any information on it.

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** No, no further.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** Does the IFI plan to recoup that money?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I do not believe so.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** The reason I ask is purely if IFI had overpaid €7,900, surely it should get €7,900. How was the decision made to reclaim only €1,000?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Again, that was a matter for the two section 18 appointees, but I would assume they only dealt with the time they were in office.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** There is a failure of procedure we have to drill down into, namely, that there was no written confirmation or written agreement from the board for the contractual change of base that would lead to increased subsistence payments. Does Mr. Fox believe IFI will now put in place a procedure whereby any contractual base changes must be approved by the board?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That is already in place.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** That is in place.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** When was that put in place?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That was put in place during the governance review. We now basically have a policy in place that does not allow that to happen without the approval of the executive leadership team, ELT, or the board, depending on the employee level.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** Does the Department believe the money should be recouped?

**Ms Catherine McGinty:** The recoupment would be a matter for IFI.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** On a similar line, overclaimed travel expenses, I understand a former board member was a staff representative on the board. This person had an IFI work vehicle, parked it near their base and drove the car privately to board meetings in Dublin, but claimed full rate expenses. Is Mr. Fox aware of this?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I will ask the head of finance to speak to it.

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** Yes, I am.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** Has that former board member been asked to repay the full amount of overclaimed travel expenses?

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** No.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** Does Ms Champion have a figure for how much this person overclaimed?

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** Yes. It is in the report.

**Mr. Seamus McCarthy:** It was €1,312.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** Is that just for one month or is that the total?

**Mr. Seamus McCarthy:** It was in respect of five trips.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** Is that person who was on the board still an employee at IFI?

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** They are, yes.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** Would it make sense to try to claim that back by way of clawback through the salary?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** I am not sure when it stopped. I am sorry; I know when it stopped, but I am not sure of the agreement in place with the individual at the time as to why they were taking their own vehicle. However, I know it was stopped.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** Obviously, if somebody is using his or her own vehicle, it is hard for an organisation to detect that, so I understand that, but now that IFI has knowledge of it, it has an obligation to act and seek that this money be recouped. Would IFI be willing to give a commitment today that it will recoup that €1,000-plus?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** What I will give a commitment to is that we will review the situation and look at all the information that was involved in the decision at the time and come back to the Deputy in writing.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** Okay. Mr. Fox might come back to me in writing because I do not think IFI can say it will review it and then not reclaim the money. I am putting it to him now that that money should be recouped, purely out of principal, because at the end of the day there are good travel allowances and good subsistence in place for people to be supported, and there are work vehicles and everything. However, we cannot allow somebody to abuse it - we all have knowledge of the abuse - and then let them away with it. We need that bit of accountability from IFI. That is a way for IFI as well to show this committee it is serious about this and that it wants to get it resolved. Were any disciplinary or governance processes undertaken in response to that behaviour?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Not that I am aware of, no.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** That is another thing. If anyone here overclaimed mileage or travel or anything, they would be repaying it. They would be hauled before this committee or something. It is just so important that IFI is aware of actual information of an actual abuse of the system. It has to be clawed back.

The next issue I want to ask about is the removal of board members in February 2023. Why were the remaining board members removed instead of simply new members being appointed to restore a quorum?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That would not be a matter for IFI. That is a matter for the Minister.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** I understand the board members were described as diligent and hardworking, and they were all removed. How was the decision taken to remove members from the board of IFI?

**Ms Catherine McGinty:** The decision to remove the board members was taken in the round with all the issues that were going on at the time. It was determined that it would be more effective to remove the board, put interim appointees in place and then appoint a new board.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** Was the board removed because it was ineffective?

**Ms Catherine McGinty:** No, the senior counsel review, which finished in July 2022, made no suggestion that the board was ineffective at that point. The board became unviable because of the continuous reservations from the board at not being able to establish a quorum. It was those resignations and the fact that it could not meet the functions of the board-----

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** Surely if the remaining board members were not ineffective, it would have made more sense just to appoint however many board members were needed. It is good to have rotation on a board, but it is also good to have a working knowledge of the organisation. Why was the decision taken to remove them?

**Ms Catherine McGinty:** I do not know why the Minister made that decision, but what I could suggest is that it relates to the appointment process. People have to go through a State board appointment process. That would have taken time, which would have meant the board for that period of time - it can take up to six months - would not have had a quorum.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** Okay. Sometimes, there are people on boards who are trying to do good and figure out what is happening in an organisation to accelerate it. Then, these members were removed, which does not really make sense. They could have been left there. They had working knowledge of the issues. They were trying to work through them, obviously, because they were not removed until February 2023. It just looked like it was a case of clearing the house, and we will go again. Sometimes that can be acceptable, but I just do not understand the rationale behind that.

**Ms Catherine McGinty:** It is clear that they were removed on a no-fault basis, so it was very clear that it was not anything to do with the board members. It was a decision to remove the board overall.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** I know, but Ms McGinty knows how that comes across.

I am conscious of my time. I want to go back to those systemic governance failures around the expenses. I know it is only a small amount of money, but if we can get the basics right in any organisation, everything else will flourish from there. Did the Comptroller and Auditor General recognise any internal weaknesses or control deficiencies in his report that he thought IFI should improve on?

**Mr. Seamus McCarthy:** What we were trying to do with the report was to pull all this together. There is obviously a considerable amount of work that has been done by IFI itself and by the section 18 appointees and the new board. There are internal audits and so on. There is a huge amount of learning there. We would be looking to see that all of those actions that are identified are being followed up. With each audit that goes on, we would be looking to see that the current board is overseeing the implementation of all that action.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** At what point is it decided that, say, a special report has to be done?

**Mr. Seamus McCarthy:** That depends on the circumstances. I decided that this had affected at least two sets of financial statements. There would have been maybe management letter points even before that. However, the thing had become so complex that I just felt it was necessary to try to draw a line under it and get all these issues on paper and try to assist in a new start for the organisation.

**Deputy Albert Dolan:** Okay. Go raibh maith agat.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Our next questioner is Deputy McAuliffe.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** I thank the Chair. I have a slot for Questions on Promised Legislation in the Dáil Chamber, so I am taking Deputy Ardagh's slot here. I thank my fellow committee members.

I welcome the witnesses back. It is their third appearance. They are like contestants on "The X Factor"; they keep coming back. The question is, having acknowledged good work being done now at this level, whether they will get through to the next round and, hopefully, not come back. It is worth reflecting on because the Chairman and I sat on the previous Committee of Public Accounts. There was significant discussion on the record at the committee with regard to the previous board, the chief executive and the issues. When we go through them, they were incredibly significant issues around dormant accounts funding, particular properties such as Ashleigh and the CEO's expenses. What an organisation wants to do is come into the Committee of Public Accounts and establish confidence in the organisation and the public money that is being allocated to it. I hope we do that today.

I want to reflect on some of the board issues because some board members were not present at the previous Committee of Public Account meetings. There was a particular discussion. Deputy Dolan has asked about the approval of the change of base for the CEO. On the contract with the CEO, on a previous occasion we established his base was Citywest. That was never changed formally in writing with the board's approval or with any knowledge of the board. Is that correct?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We have a letter on file from the head of HR at the time confirming the change of base and confirming her discussion with the chair, I believe.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** That decision was made by the head of HR and not by the board.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I do not have that detail.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** It is important information because it gets to the root of who changed the base of the CEO.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** For clarity, no business case was in place. This was reported in the special report. There is no formal minute from the board meeting. All the information we have about this is the letter from the head of HR and the signing of expenses by-----

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** On the basis of the records of the board, there is no board decision that the base of the CEO was changed in any way.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That is correct.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** A reference was made that the Comptroller and Auditor General had a copy of a letter. That is the letter from the head of HR, who was a subordinate of the CEO.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes, that is correct.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** The board was grappling with a significant number of issues, to be fair to it. I have listed them. There is a question. There was inevitably a disagreement here between the board and the CEO. That is where issues always grind into difficulty. Deputy Dolan touched on it as well. On the reason for dismissing the board on a no-fault basis, many people who are involved in public life come forward to serve on these boards and I imagine it was a very unsatisfactory way for those board members to finish their time with IFI. Did IFI have any communication with them after the decision?

**Ms Catherine McGinty:** I am not aware of it, but I imagine there would have been communication with the Department and the board members.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** The then Minister, Deputy Ryan, made that decision in order to try to progress the issues and move on. However, those board members were left in a position where they were no longer members of a board, no longer able to attend the Committee of Public Accounts and no longer able to, in a public way, put forward their position on the matter. We left them, in many ways, very vulnerable in these circumstances. Is that fair?

**Ms Catherine McGinty:** The basis on which they were removed was no-fault, which is testament to the individuals and how they were-----

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** Anyone who finishes their time with an organisation in that way would inevitably feel a shadow was left over them, although the Minister was clear it was on a no-fault basis. Would the Comptroller and Auditor General like to comment on that?

**Mr. Seamus McCarthy:** I am looking at section 18. The Minister would not have been in a position to appoint appointees to carry out oversight without removing the board and the board having-----

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** Therefore, it was a necessary step.

**Mr. Seamus McCarthy:** Yes, it was a necessary step in order to appoint two people, nominees of the Minister, to oversee the business of IFI.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** It was a structural response. I will come back to that point. They were dismissed on a no-fault basis. I have some sympathy for people who step forward to serve in a position where there is a disagreement with a CEO, who is often in a full-time position and has the capacity of the organisation and so on, not specifically in this case but in general, where directors are sometimes left vulnerable. I will leave it at that.

On the dormant accounts funding, is IFI satisfied that it has got to the bottom of the issues that arose regarding dormant accounts?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes, we are.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** There were significant concerns about the overheads which were attached to that. Six members of staff were appointed. Laptops and equipment were needed for them and the level of funding that was going to individual groups seemed to be very small. Is that a fair reflection?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I do not think it is a fair reflection. Following audit, we elected to pay back €28,000. We were asked pay a portion of it. We elected to pay the full amount of €28,000. The animators, as we will call them - the people who were on the ground - were delivering for the money that was funded from the Dormant Accounts Fund.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** The question was whether a sufficient amount of the overall allocated resources went to the organisations on the ground.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No, we certainly tried to fund the organisations that were interested in rolling out programmes. Unfortunately, we could not come to agreement with both of them.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** Okay. Was IFI satisfied that all the organisations that received funding existed and operated and that there were outcomes following the audit?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I assume the Deputy is referring to the Maugherow issue.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** Yes, I am.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The Maugherow Sea Angling Club was funded through the governing body, the Angling Council of Ireland, ACI. It was out of process with the policy for funding at the time. However, very quickly after that, the club got its own bank account and had its constitution in place. I was with it two weeks ago and confirmed that all the equipment is still in use. The club is active and is interested in doing some youth angling development work with us in 2026.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** I will move on to the issue of the number of credit cards. I heard some evidence earlier, which for my benefit the witnesses might repeat. The number has been reduced and there are more controls in that space.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes, we are now down from 17 to five credit cards and we will review them again in the new year.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** In what circumstances are staff permitted to use credit cards?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We have a number of staff who do a lot of foreign travel. When people go to such places as the USA for angling promotion events and so on, it would be a significant burden on them to have to spend their own money. They have use of a credit card therefore to hire a car, book accommodation and such things, if it cannot be done through the purchase order, PO, system. However, every cent spent on a credit card goes through the purchase order system. It is not a matter of people just walking in and tapping the card. There is back-up paperwork for that spending.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** Are those statements reviewed?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** Who are they reviewed by?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Finance and corporate services.

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** We are down to five credit cards now so there will be a lot less reviewing. Our expenditure on credit cards to the end of October is €67,000 over the 17 cards. That is approximately €4,000 per card. The type of expenditure now is mostly on things that cannot be done through a normal PO system.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** An online purchase might be needed.

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** Exactly, but everything has to go through the procurement system. Our procurement is being watched now all the time because the common thread that can be seen through everything we have had has been procurement.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** Of all the evidence I have heard at the Committee of Public Accounts, one of the jawdropping issues was the insurance with regard to the number of

vehicles affected and the exposure that left for the State and IFI. Will the witnesses give us an update about where things stand on that?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I will ask our logistics manager to update the Deputy.

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** The overall cost was €229,056.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** I am asking about the fleet and insurance in place at the moment and the use of fleet as compared with in-house vehicles.

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** Fleet insurance premiums in 2021 were €86,705. Currently, this year it is €112,071, which also reflects the additional level of cover we now have in place and the nature of the insurance market with increases across the board.

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe:** I will not test the Cathaoirleach's timing. I thank him.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** I welcome everyone. I will get started with Mr. Fox. Am I correct that he is the acting CEO?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** Was 2021 the year he started?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I started as the head of operations in July 2022.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** Was Mr. Fox employed before by IFI?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes, I was a director in the Loughs Agency, which is part of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission, the North-South fisheries body, and before that, I was in the regional board structure.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** As Mr. Fox is the acting CEO, can he tell me whether there a full board is in place now?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** How many members does it have?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** There are currently eight members of the board. Two stood down, one on health grounds and the other due to issues with her company.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** There are eight members now.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** There are eight members. There is a process to recruit two members as we speak.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** There should be ten.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** There should be ten, yes.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** There should be ten but there are eight. What is a quorum for meetings?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** A quorum is five.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** I read in one of the articles that IFI could not impose fines because there were not enough board members at one stage. Is that correct?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** IFI could not impose penalties.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Is this coming back to the delegation issue?

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** Yes. Whenever the board wants to impose penalties, it must have a quorum. Is that correct?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** I might go back over that again. I thought I had read that. I want to go back to a question that was brought up by one of my colleagues earlier regarding consultants. Was the figure quoted €2 million?

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** Yes, between legal and other non-legal-----

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** That was just in 2024.

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** That is right.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** The document I have here would have been in place in the year that Mr. Fox was on board.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** It is a document relating to Inland Fisheries from Ernst and Young, EY. Is that correct?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** How much did the production of the document cost in consultation fees?

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** It cost €58,000.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** This document cost €58,000. I cannot get over the incredible waste of money that has happened here in relation to consultants. It is extraordinary to spend that amount of money. Some €2 million was spent on consultants. How many staff are there?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** There are 329 permanent staff.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** There are 329 staff and €2 million was spent on consultants. Does Mr. Fox think IFI gets good value for money for all those consultations?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That was the total for legal fees and consultancy. It was not just consultancy. We are enforcement body, so we spend a significant amount of money on our panel of solicitors around the country to bring forward a prosecution.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** That is on solicitors.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** I am talking about consultations with bodies such as Ernst and Young.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The figure of €2 million is not correct.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** Was it €59,000?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** Yes.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** So, €59,000 was spent on this document. Does Mr. Fox feel IFI got good value for that €59,000?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The appointment of Ernst and Young to do that external review was by the Department.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** IFI spent the money. The money came out-----

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Ernst and Young did a very good job. It was very engaged with the organisation over quite a period and gave us quite a lot of good guidance.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** It gave good guidance. Did IFI follow any of that guidance?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We did indeed, yes.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** We will get down to the guidance and recommendations from Ernst and Young. It recommended that within three months, there should be a clear definition and agreement of the strategic remit of IFI. Does Mr. Fox think there is now a clear remit and strategic purpose for IFI?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** A new strategy is at strategic environmental assessment, SEA, stage. It will, we hope, be signed off by the Minister in the next four or five days.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** Is another consultant doing that document?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That document was done by EY as well, with ourselves.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** How much has the IFI spent on consultations with EY in the past year?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** In the past year.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** How much was spent in the year we are auditing, 2024?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** In the year we are auditing, we spent €58,000 on the report. The following year was implementation of €29,000.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** There were just the two consultations in that year.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** One was implementation and supporting us in implementing-----

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** So, it cost €29,000 to implement the recommendations that were made.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** Yes.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** I find it hard to believe that IFI could not implement its own recommendations and that it needed somebody else to come in and get the recommendations. Did EY have to implement them or make sure the IFI was implementing them?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** It was to support us in the implementation.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** That is unbelievable. The next thing it recommended related to the membership of the board. Is that now in place?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** It recommended a refreshing of support and governance structures and the provision of training.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** Has that been done? Training and induction of the board has been done. There is no CEO, so there could not be a good relationship between the CEO and the chair.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** What I would say is that there is an excellent relationship between the executive and the chair.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** The board is up and running. Has Mr. Fox 12 months' worth of minutes from all the meetings? Could we have those? Can Mr. Fox get them to the committee?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We can provide them, yes. For which year?

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** For 2024, the year that is being audited. I would like to see the board minutes from that year. In the next six months, IFI is supposed to address the function and effectiveness of SMT. What is SMT?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The senior management team, which is now the executive leadership team.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** We still do not have a CEO in the senior management team. Does Mr. Fox think it is good function and effectiveness if we do not have a CEO at the helm? There is nobody in charge.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** There is somebody in charge.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** Mr. Fox is operating in an acting capacity.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes, but the executive is functioning very well and the review has been done.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** There are a lot of issues here. There seem to have been an awful lot of issues over the years. I do not know if it is operating very well. I would not use those words. Within those 12 months, Mr. Fox believes that everything within the executive summary that Ernst and Young produced, all those recommendations, are now in place.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The final recommendation relates to the publication of our strategy for the period 2026 to 2030. That will be closed out in a matter of weeks.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** I want to move on to staffing. Was there an increase of staff in 2024?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** There was an increase of eight in-----

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** In 2023.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** -----2023 and nine in 2025.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** What was the cost of that? How much extra did IFI spend on staff in that year?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** I can pull that out for the Deputy.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** It is okay. That is all right.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** We are underfunded for our staff.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** Nearly all of the €40.5 million goes on staff. Some 90% of it goes on staff.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** That is correct. Our Exchequer grant is €33 million, and €35 million this year. Our pay budget is underfunded.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** The witnesses will come back to me on how many staff they had employed with additional income and how much additional money came in that year for staffing.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** Yes, I will.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** Some €1.4 million was spent that year on unsociable hours.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** Why would that be?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We do not pay any overtime or for out-of-hours working. There has been an agreement in place since the 1980s regarding unsocial hours' allowance, UHA, payments to staff who work unsocial hours.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** They get additionality.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** That is great. Mr. Fox said that the staff are providing an excellent service. How much was spent on fuel cards in 2024?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** We are looking at 2023.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** Okay.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** I will have to get that out for the Deputy.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** If Ms Campion could furnish me with that, it would be fantastic. I also noted in an article that there is now 90% fewer salmon. Why would that be if the staff of IFI was doing such a fantastic job?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Salmon stocks have been in dramatic decline since the 1970s. IFI is doing everything it can to control the freshwater environment. There is a lot more to be done. There is a lot of restoration work to be done at scale in the country. There is a lot more work to be done with other agencies on trying to deal with other pressures that are on salmon numbers and a number of other fish species. The big issue, without question, is water quality. That is a matter on which we have to work with other organisations.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** What is IFI doing to address that? Is it just going to keep letting it deteriorate? Is it not the job of IFI-----

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** -----to ensure we have fish?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It is all about the fish for IFI.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** It is also about ensure we have water of a good quality for fish.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The water quality is certainly a matter for the EPA and the regional councils. IFI has a limited role in the enforcement function under enforcing the water pollution Acts and one section of the 1959 fisheries Act. Our powers in that area are quite limited.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** In relation to the cottages at Aasleagh Lodge and cottages, will Mr. Fox give me a briefing on what happened there? Those cottages were leased by an employee. Is that correct?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes. Back in 2017, a lease was agreed with an employee of the organisation for the cottages only. That went on for a number of years. Then, for a period of six months approximately, Aasleagh house was included. I believe the CEO was made aware of it and reported it to the board. A decision was taken to collapse that contract.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** An employee had the lease. Did the employee make a rental income then? Did the rental income go to IFI or the employee?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It was shared out. Does Ms Campion have the detail of it?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** The employee earned €77,000 in rental income, which was shared with IFI.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** Why would IFI share that €77,000 with an employee for houses it owns?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** I do not know and nobody here knows the answer. The people who agreed the deal are all gone.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** Where has that €77,000 gone?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** That is over five years. The income into IFI was around 20% of that plus light and heat were covered as well. I have the accounts here for Aasleagh.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** Is that not fraud? Does it not-----

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** It was written down in a written agreement.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** It was a written agreement but IFI never got the money back. I cannot understand an employee coming in and getting rent for buildings belonging to IFI.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** She was charged with actually renting them out as holiday lets.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** She was renting them out.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** She was renting them out but IFI own them.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** She was getting the money for them.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** She was renting them out on the market. She was getting paid but she was paying IFI a share of that money.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** Where is the share that she got? Why would she get a share of that money? I cannot understand that.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It went out to a tender. It went out to an expression of interest within the organisation for somebody to take them on on a short-term basis. It was expected that this would only last for a short period of time but it extended on for a number of years.

**Deputy Cathy Bennett:** Is that contract finished now?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Absolutely.

**An Cathaoirleach:** I have a number of questions. Mr. Fox is acting chief executive. When did he take over that role?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I took over the role in September this year.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Are you also a member of the board?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No. I am not an *ex-officio* member, as the deputy CEO.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Were you previously a member of the board?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Mr. Fox stated the board got the report on the protected disclosure relating to the accident, when he came in to clarify, in February of this year. He said there were three recommendations in that report.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes. The report came down from the Department to the chair of IFI. There were three findings in the report. Two were around IFI not having the correct insurance in place and the third was IFI knowingly providing insurance details to An Garda Síochána. The board and the audit and risk committee, ARC, had accepted the first two but refuted the third, which was knowingly presenting the insurance details to An Garda Síochána.

**An Cathaoirleach:** The third finding was refuted.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Has that been appealed?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** A letter from the chair went back to the Department on it. Apart from that, I am not quite sure where it is right now.

**An Cathaoirleach:** You are not quite sure. I find it extraordinary that Mr. Fox came before us today and, midway through, he had to correct the record that he had not got the relevant information. Even in terms of the recommendations, he does not have the relevant information, when this has been cited within the special report by the C and AG. I am sure, as acting CEO,

he should have informed himself of the full and total complexity and the issues relating to this case. Does he accept that?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I will certainly go and find that information when I go back but generally--  
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**An Cathaoirleach:** You should have had that information before coming in here.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes. I accept that.

**An Cathaoirleach:** You accept that. It does not really give us much confidence that Mr. Fox has not informed himself in relation to that. Is the staff member who was involved in that accident still within the organisation?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Are they actively working and-----

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Absolutely.

**An Cathaoirleach:** I have concerns in relation to how the whole thing was handled. Mr. Fox said he is a board member or can sit on the board.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We attend the board meetings. The CEO, when appointed, will be an *ex officio* member of the board.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Mr. Fox said that when issues such as protected disclosures, PDs, are being discussed, he would have to excuse himself, or a process is there to discuss issues such as this.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** All our PDs now go external. They are assessed externally. A lot of the PDs coming in over the past number of years may have included members of staff, so the decision was taken to outsource that.

**An Cathaoirleach:** The former chief executive officer finished employment in June of this year. He had been out on leave since March 2024. Am I correct on that?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes, 2024.

**An Cathaoirleach:** It was 13 months or thereabouts. Ms Campion said he had been paid for some of that duration.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** For 2023, he was paid for the full year.

**An Cathaoirleach:** He was employed for the full year of 2023.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** Yes. For 2024, he had full pay until 3 June and moved to half pay. He was on full pay until 3 June and moved to half pay from 4 June to 4 September. He was then on full pay until he finished up on 4 June 2025.

**An Cathaoirleach:** How did it come about that he went from full pay to half pay and then back to full pay? What was the process? How did that come about?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** The matter of the CEO's employment is with the board. We would take instruction on what he is to be paid but I would not have the background.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Ms Campion has no background on that.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** I have given you the information that I have.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Might anyone from finance have any-----

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** I am finance.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It is the board-----

**An Cathaoirleach:** It seems quite bizarre. There is no rationale. Has Mr. Fox been given a rationale as to why a situation like that might come about? Was he not aware of this, as chief executive?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No. It is a matter for the board of IFI. They are the employer.

**An Cathaoirleach:** It seems extraordinary the former chief executive remained on full pay up until 4 June.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** He was paid the full entitlements under his contract.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Was the end of the five-year contract on 4 June?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** The end of the contract was 28 November.

**An Cathaoirleach:** It was 28 November, so he finished ahead of the end of the contract. I ask for a full note from the board in relation to that. It is bizarre, to say the least. I would love to see how that situation came about and what the rationale was for someone going from full pay to half pay and then having it fully restored. I ask that we get a full note on that. Do we know why the former chief executive was on leave?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No. We would not be made aware of the reasons behind the leave.

**An Cathaoirleach:** I find it extraordinary. I would appreciate a note on that.

Reference was made to the WRC case that came about as a result of a very short process. I am not sure whether "process" is the right word. It was said a protected disclosure came in in relation to that particular case and, four days later, moves were made to remove that former staff member after 37 years of service. Were a number of issues contained in that protected disclosure? Does Mr. Fox know the nature of the complaints in that?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I do not have the details of the protected disclosure.

**An Cathaoirleach:** There was one issue, which was elaborated on within the WRC. There were issues in relation to a vehicle; I think it was a tractor. Is that-----

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That is right, yes.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Do we know on what basis that came about? It was alleged an individual had a vehicle, in this instance, a tractor, or something like that-----

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The tractor was located at his house for well over a decade.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Do we know how long exactly?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I would not have the actual length of time. I can provide the committee with that detail.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Was that tractor being used by IFI?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It was being used intermittently by IFI but there was a base about 7 km from the location where the tractor was being held.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Would it have been the normal process around that time for a vehicle such as that to be kept at individuals' homes?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Over the years, there certainly was equipment held at locations around the country at people's homes, where bases were not available. We have moved from that now. There is one area in Cavan, where we do not have a base located, where people would bring certain pieces of equipment home but I am talking about small items. There appears to have been a local agreement in place in regard to the tractor issue but we cannot find any paperwork to substantiate that.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Is there any other example such as that? I am sure on foot of that there was an exercise and audit carried out within the organisation to identify whether there were other similar circumstances. Was there a process carried out?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** There was. There as a review of all our equipment and where it was stored. I do not believe any issues were identified that we were concerned about.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Was a fuel card attached to that particular vehicle?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** There was, yes.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Will Mr. Fox talk to me about the process around fuel cards at the time? Was there a fuel card attached to every vehicle, or who had access to fuel cards?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Fuel cards are individually assigned to each vehicle so we can clearly see what vehicle the fuel is used for.

**An Cathaoirleach:** At that time, that particular tractor was held for ten years or more with a fuel card. Who would have signed off on the purchase of fuel? What kind of authority or clearing process was there for the use of that fuel card? Who was monitoring its use?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The supervisor of that person would be approving the spend on the fuel card and that would go into the finance section and be reviewed there. It would also go into the logistics section to be analysed against the vehicle to ensure the use was within the norms for that type of vehicle.

**An Cathaoirleach:** In that particular instance, who was the person submitting and authorising that?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The person who was using the card or authorising the card?

**An Cathaoirleach:** Authorising the card.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I would have said over a long period of time it would have been two previous regional directors in the western region.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Earlier on, Mr. Fox made reference to how there had been a number of Garda investigations. Files went to the DPP. The DPP subsequently ruled not to proceed. Mr. Fox then said there was one issue still under investigation. Is that under investigation by IFI or by An Garda Síochána?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It is an internal matter.

**An Cathaoirleach:** It is an internal matter, unrelated to any of those protected disclosures, or is that investigation ongoing with IFI on foot of a protected disclosure?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I have not seen the detail, to date, of the protected disclosures that come into the organisation unless they are addressed to me. They go to our compliance officer.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Can Mr. Fox give us a rough idea of what the ongoing internal investigation at the organisation at the moment is?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It is to do with the recovery of coded wire tags from salmon that return to rivers. They are used by the Marine Institute for a research programme.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Is there an allegation of some wrongdoing there or what is the issue?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** There were payments made from one organisation to ourselves and we are reviewing all of that now to ensure that if there are issues, we will address them. We have not closed the investigation out as yet but we are working on it.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Has IFI engaged with An Garda Síochána during that investigation? No.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Not at this point. Were there ever any allegations of blackmail brought to the board's notice or to the notice of Mr. Fox as acting chief executive officer?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No, I would not be aware of that.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Mr. Fox would not be aware of that. It is not something that would have been discussed at board level at any point, that Mr. Fox is aware of?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No.

**An Cathaoirleach:** I will leave it at that. I have a number of other questions but I will let other members come in at this point.

**Mr. Seamus McCarthy:** Chair, can I come in on a point about evidence that was given earlier?

**An Cathaoirleach:** Of course you can.

**Mr. Seamus McCarthy:** I cannot remember which Deputy was asking about the board's potential authorisation of a change of base. It was mentioned that there was a letter to the former chief executive indicating that there was a change of base. There is not anything in that letter that suggests the chair of the board at the time was aware of the change of location, just to be clear on that. I can provide a copy of the letter if required.

**An Cathaoirleach:** That would be useful. We will open it up again for a second round. Deputy Kenny is next.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** How much time will I have?

**An Cathaoirleach:** Five minutes.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Perfect. After the break, Mr. Fox corrected the record in regard to three findings. I presume he rang someone during the break to find out?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I did indeed, yes.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Did Mr. Fox ring the chair of the board?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Did he ring a member of the board?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I rang our compliance officer who deals with all of our PDs.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** The compliance officer did not make Mr. Fox aware that findings were released to the board.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** They were released to the ARC.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** It was only today that he made Mr. Fox aware of that.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It is a she.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** It is a she.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It is not something I would have dealt with at the time. I thought the Deputy was talking about a different issue that we were dealing with.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** What different issue?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It is an issue around the same thing. Contact was made from An Garda Síochána approximately seven or eight weeks ago.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** This contact would have been made from the Department.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Pardon?

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** This contact would have been made from the Department.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes, that was as a consequence of a contact from the Department that there was an issue being considered by the chair relating to An Garda Síochána.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** There are three findings, two in relation to the incident itself and one to the false insurance documents. The board is refuting the false documents.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That is correct.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** We can all refute it. There is no refuting this; it is a matter of fact. On 16 November 2021 the board of IFI, as well as the chief executive officer, were made aware, officially at that stage, that the documentation was inaccurate.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes, that is correct.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** It did not provide that evidence to An Garda Síochána.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It is knowingly allowed an individual to present insurance documentation that we knowingly knew was false. That is the issue that was being refuted.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** What would Mr. Fox say to the former CEO who said at the public accounts committee that he knew on the day of the accident?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I cannot speak for the former CEO.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** How can the board refute that when the former CEO said he knew on the day?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We have clear evidence to demonstrate that the case was that we did not know we had a liability until the insurance company came back and told us in November of that year.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** The insurance company told yourselves in November-----

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** -----that the documentation was inaccurate.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That cover would not be extended to that vehicle.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** No, that the documentation provided to An Garda Síochána was inaccurate.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No. I will let the head of logistics who was dealing with it answer that, but it is the cover piece.

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** In regard to the insurance policy we had, when the incident arose on 10 August 2021, the insurance company was notified of the incident and there was a clarification sought by the insurers as to whether that vehicle had been declared. It was not the case that they had said on the date of the incident that there was no insurance and that no indemnity would be provided. It was through a series of communications with the insurers over the period up until mid November 2021 that we got clarification that, in this case, the insurer would be declining cover.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Why did Mr. Cusack not bring that to the attention of An Garda Síochána or the staff member at that stage?

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** IFI had been in contact with the employee.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** IFI did not make the employee aware of that until October 2022, a year later.

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** There is correspondence between IFI and the employee in respect of trying to resolve the issue with the insurers.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** No. In October 2022 IFI made the employee aware the vehicle was uninsured and the only reason IFI did that was because he received a letter from a solicitor and a personal claims letter to say the insurance he provided to An Garda Síochána was inaccurate.

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** The employee was in contact with IFI prior to that notification. In other words, IFI was trying to keep the employee apprised of the situation. It may be the case that a notification went in 2022 but it is not true to say IFI was not in contact with the employee.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Did IFI say to the employee, "The car was not insured. We received this on 16 November 2021 and the car is not insured"?

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** Not at that time.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Why?

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** I have no-----

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** You threw him under the bus. You allowed-----

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** Sorry, Deputy-----

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** You allowed him-----

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** IFI supported that individual employee-----

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** You allowed him to continue with the false documentation he provided, knowingly allowed him, at that stage.

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** IFI did not knowingly-----

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Two pieces from the code of conduct for IFI staff state that it is the policy of the IFI to comply with all relevant statutory and regulatory requirements governing its operations. If anyone other than the staff member is involved in a road traffic accident, they must show their insurance certificate to local gardaí within 24 hours. The IFI was made aware on 16 November 2021 that the insurance documentation that he provided within that 24-hour period was inaccurate and the IFI failed to tell him and to tell An Garda Síochána. The board is now refuting that and does not have a leg to stand on. An external investigation took place from former Minister Eamon Ryan's office. The external investigation basically said that the IFI knowingly allowed this to happen. It did, because on 16 November, three months after the crash, it officially knew and still failed to tell An Garda Síochána or the employee.

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** Subsequent to the-----

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Is that a fact?

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** Can I elaborate please?

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Is that a fact? Yes or no.

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** It is a fact that the insurers in mid-November came back to Inland Fisheries Ireland with a different-----

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Is it a fact that IFI did not tell An Garda Síochána or the employee when it received the official documentation that the car was uninsured? Yes or no.

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** On the date we received that information the employee and An Garda Síochána were not notified. Subsequent to receiving that correspondence-----

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** That is the critical thing there.

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** May I elaborate, Chair? Subsequent to receiving the notification from the insurers, IFI also sought further legal advice on the matter. The advice provided us with certain avenues to look at and exhaust.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Which were?

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** These included contacting the Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman. There is also an arbitration process in the policy itself, which allowed IFI an opportunity to challenge the decision of the insurers. These processes took time subsequent to the original letter in mid-November 2021.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** Did the legal advice not say the IFI gave false documentation to the employee, who in turn gave it to the Garda? The IFI received confirmation that it was not insured. It should have told the employee and An Garda Síochána that this was a live investigation.

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** There was no advice to that effect. The IFI had confirmation in mid-November that there was a declaration of indemnity in relation to that vehicle. None of the other vehicles in the 15 identified as being-----

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** If there had not been a car crash, the IFI would have continued with 16 uninsured vehicles on the road.

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** I cannot speculate on that.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** There is no speculation; it is a fact.

**Mr. Michael Cusack:** I cannot speculate when or who would have realised there was a clerical error in respect of that-----

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** The bottom line is there was an employee of Inland Fisheries Ireland involved in a car crash. IFI knowingly on 16 November continued to allow the false document it gave to him to provide to An Garda Síochána. It knowingly allowed that to continue. That is a fact.

**An Cathaoirleach:** I ask Mr. Cusack to furnish the committee with a full note on what he has said and to elaborate.

**Deputy Eoghan Kenny:** The IFI contacted solicitors after 16 November. Will it furnish the committee with the legal documents it received advising it what to do?

**An Cathaoirleach:** I thank Deputy Kenny. We will now turn to Deputy Geoghegan.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** I thank the Chair. Mr. Fox went out and phoned the compliance officer during the break in this hearing. Is that correct?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** The compliance officer represented to him the position of the board. Is that correct?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** He has not had any contact with anybody like the chair, for example, and he is the acting CEO. Is that correct?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** For clarification, there have been three acting CEOs over the past-----

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Is Mr. Fox the acting CEO right now?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Does he report to the chair of the board?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Correct.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Why did he ring the compliance officer and not the chair of the board?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Because I knew she would know.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Okay. Mr. Fox is here representing the position of the board on a serious issue, without the chair. However, he is confident that what the compliance officer has represented is the true and accurate position of the board.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** The position of the board, following the conclusion of an external investigator appointed by the Department into a protected disclosure made by the driver of the uninsured vehicle in the accident, who is an employee of IFI, is that it completely and utterly refutes the key finding of the external investigator that IFI knowingly provided false documentation to An Garda Síochána. Is that-----

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That is correct.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** How is that a sustainable position?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It is a sustainable position because we can clearly demonstrate when we became aware that the documentation was not-----

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** How does Mr. Fox say that with such confidence, when before he left the room, he did not know anything about this protected disclosure?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I knew-----

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Hold on, hold on.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Sorry.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** He did not know anything about this protected disclosure. He did not know anything about this report. He phoned the compliance officer, not even the chair of the board, and now he has come back with such utter confidence to say that they can refute this entirely. How can he explain that to us?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I will explain it clearly. We have the timeline of events and how we established we had no insurance for the vehicle. At the time the-----

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Was Mr. Fox at this board meeting in February 2025?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes, I was.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Is he joking me? He was at the board meeting in February 2025 when the Department notified the external investigators' report to the board.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The report was notified to the board and the ARC was tasked with dealing with it.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Hold on. Mr. Fox was at the board meeting when this report was revealed to it in February 2025.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I had no sight of the report at the time.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** So, he just forgot when I asked. Earlier on, I asked everybody here what knowledge they had in relation to this. Mr. Fox said he had no knowledge. He said with protected disclosures, sometimes he leaves the room. Ms McGinty from the Department had no knowledge. I am not putting any fault on her, she just had no knowledge of it. I presume that position has not changed. Mr. Fox said he had no knowledge but now he is saying he was at the meeting when it was disclosed to the board that an external investigation was carried out and those three findings were presented to the board. Is that what he is now saying?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No. The issue was raised at the board meeting and referred to the ARC.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** It was referred to what?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The audit and risk committee, ARC.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** What was referred to the ARC?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The report from the Minister. I did not have sight of the report.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** But he was at the meeting when this report was notified. Will he just clarify? It is really simple. Was he at the board meeting when this report was notified to the board?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Why did he tell the committee that he knew nothing about this report if he was at the board meeting when this report was notified to them? Will he please just answer that simple-----

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Because I-----

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** He is at an Oireachtas committee here-----

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I know. I am aware-----

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** -----where we are trying to get answers about an organisation that he said is punching above its weight. Will he please give us a clear answer as to why he did not tell this committee he was at the board meeting when an external investigation had been notified to the board?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I was not aware of the detail of the investigation at that time.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Sorry, his previous position was that he was not aware about any of it. We asked everybody here. I clearly asked. Was he concealing information from this committee?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No, absolutely not.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** What did he know when he told us he knew nothing?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It was something that was not in my head at the time. I was at the meeting-

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**Deputy James Geoghegan:** What does that mean? It was something that was not in his head. Did he know information before he left this room about this report of any variety?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** None whatsoever.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Not that I am aware of, no.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** What does he mean, not that he is aware of? It is his mind.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes, I have no recollection of any information-----

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** He has no recollection.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** -----from this report at the time of the February board meeting or being informed about detail of it at that time.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Now, he comes in with all his bravado saying he is utterly confident that he can completely refute a determination made by an external investigator appointed independently of both the Department and the inland fisheries committee. He can come in with total bravado and say that is all a load of rubbish and IFI can respond accordingly.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That is the board's position, yes.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Mr. Fox can see how we find all this-----

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I understand.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** -----earth-shatteringly astonishing and not even remotely credible. Did Mr. Fox have a look at the previous appearance of the IFI before the public accounts committee? He was not there himself, but before preparing for this, did he have a look at the transcript?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I was here. I was here as one of the executive.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** He was here. He was present. I will not prolong this because my time is running out and Deputy Kenny has alluded to it. Mr. Fox knows who Ms Róisín Bradley is. Was she lying to the committee when she said, in reply to Alan Dillon's question about the date IFI established it had no insurance; "On 10 August, the day the accident occurred"? Was she lying to the committee then?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** What I can say is that Ms Bradley was incorrect and we can demonstrate that through clear timelines.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Ms Bradley was incorrect, the former CEO was incorrect, and Mr. Fox, who knew nothing about this report and then somehow miraculously now is coming to the committee telling us about the report, and with all his bravado, is saying that all of this is a load of rubbish, and that he is on the credible side of this argument and they are on the non-credible side. Is that what Mr. Fox is saying?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I will not use the Deputy's words but as I have said, and I will say again, we have a very clear timeline to demonstrate when the organisation became aware of when we had no cover.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** I have one final question, and I thank the Cathaoirleach for indulging me with a bit of extra time here. The Department has made a clear finding against Inland Fisheries Ireland, IFI. The IFI board has said it does not like that finding and has written back to the Department. How is that the end of the matter? Maybe the Department can assist me here. If a Department appoints an external investigator and makes a very clear finding following that protected disclosure against the entity being investigated, what is the consequence for the entity being investigated if it refutes that finding?

**Ms Catherine McGinty:** I am not really sure to be honest. There is a protected disclosures unit within the Department that deals with those. My understanding is that the recommendations in the report are notified and it has the option of accepting them and notifying the Department of the corrective actions. If there is a non-acceptance of the recommendations, I am not exactly sure what happens in that case.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** Is Mr. Fox aware what the consequence are to the board or to the IFI of not accepting a clear finding of an external investigator, as the IFI has done? Is he aware of what the consequence is to the board or to the IFI?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I do not know if there is-----

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** What is the remedy?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The remedy, as far as we are aware, is that it is being referred to An Garda Síochána.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** I thank the Cathaoirleach for the extra time. I also thank the witnesses for staying and for engaging in the conversation. In my first contribution, I asked if anybody was aware of an issue that was reported in a Workplace Relations Commission, WRC, ruling of this year where a staff member was asked to chaperone another staff member's child to go down town and get an ice cream. Is it still the case or did the IFI make any phone calls about that while the committee was on a break?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No. I need more detail. That detail is not going to leave me in a position---  
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**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** That is not enough. Was Mr. Fox the CEO on 18 March 2025, or acting CEO, or deputy CEO?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No.

**Ms Suzanne Champion:** I was.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Ms Campion was. What role was Mr. Fox in ?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The head of operations.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** In March 2025.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** The WRC published a report about a case that was taken by an individual against IFI on the 18 March 2025. Was the director of operations not aware of that report?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That is-----

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Was the acting CEO not aware of that report at the time?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** It is not ringing any bells. I am sorry. No.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** It is remarkable that the IFI organisation at a senior leadership level would not be aware of a WRC ruling about the organisation.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** Absolutely.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Under oath, the complainant taking the case against the witnesses' organisation at the time makes a claim that she was asked on 27 July 2022, which was nine days after Mr. Fox's appointment in Galway-----

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Okay.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** No. That cannot be the crux that makes this make sense. There are not too many examples of a story like this where just because I said "Galway" now it makes sense.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I want to-----

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** The allegation was put under oath.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** She was asked to chaperone a child and bring that child down town while directors met in Galway. Did that happen?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** She was asked by the previous head of operations to take my son down town at lunchtime when she was going to lunch. Yes.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** You did not make that request?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Pardon?

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** You did not make that request?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No. I did not make that request. No. I did not even know the lady.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Did you know it had happened?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** When we talk about other WRC cases and issues of misconduct is this not a breach of IFI's child protection guidelines that a staff member is put in a position of extreme, potential, vulnerability?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I do not agree with the Deputy at all.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Was that staff member Garda vetted?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Sorry?

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Was the staff member Garda vetted?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No-----

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** So what happens if an allegation is made?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The child in question was my child, so how am I-----

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** You were not there.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I was there.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** You did not go down town with them.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Sorry?

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Did you go down town with them?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No, I did not go down town with them.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** So you were not there. The staff member was asked to do a duty outside of her core competencies and role, according to the WRC case, to mind somebody else's child. Is that not a breach of IFI's child protection policy?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** First, Deputy, I do not see the relevance of this. That is the first thing I am going to raise. The second part is that the previous head of operations, unknown to me at the time until he had asked, asked would she take my son for a walk because he was in the car park in the car waiting for me to finish my meeting. She agreed to bring him for a walk as she was going down town. I do not see the relevance of it at all.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Is it a breach of the organisation's policy to ask staff members to mind other staff members' children, staff who are not vetted and who are not safe against any allegations? This is a legitimate question. I will tell Mr. Fox the relevance of it. It is because we have seen a series of areas that have not gotten enough attention in terms of management, governance and oversight. We have seen areas that are extremely questionable with regard to judgment. You are saying this request did not come from you and that it came from the former director of operations. Did they not double check with you before your son left?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Before they left I was aware that my son was going for a walk down to Galway, which is right beside our offices, and for a walk around the town at lunchtime.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** Is that not a breach of child protection guidelines or policies?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Not that I am aware of. I was very comfortable with that idea. I had no issue with that. Not one.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** What about the staff member's comfort levels?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** She was not directed to do it. From what I am aware, she was asked if she would take him with her.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** By the director of operations-----

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The head of operations at the time. I do not see an issue with it. I really do not.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** I really do. As a youth worker for 20 years, I see a significant issue with someone being asked to do something, number one that they are not employed to do, number two where they are completely open to allegations, and number three with a whole power dynamic where she is being asked to do this by the head of operations, which she has said under oath. As to the extent to which she was comfortable doing this or not, we cannot suggest that she was comfortable doing this at all.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We cannot say she was uncomfortable either, Deputy.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** She was not employed to do that and we have issues of governance that are systemic throughout this. What we have seen is, potentially, double standards being applied here. You raise your eyebrows.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I do raise my eyebrows, Deputy. I do not see double standards here. It was a very innocent thing where somebody was asked to take a person for a walk down town at lunchtime. The person took them for a walk down town at lunchtime. They came back to the office, and there was never an issue raised about it that I was aware of.

**Deputy Aidan Farrelly:** It was raised at the WRC.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** I offer my apologies that I missed a lot of the discussion. I had another commitment. I will just pick up on one or two issues. As a representative from Cork I am aware that the fish kill in the Blackwater river was raised earlier. Just to be clear, there is no detection of any cause of that fish kill.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That is correct. Yes.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** Is there a suspicion in relation to the cause of it? I appreciate there may not be evidence in terms of prosecution but does the IFI have some suspicion in relation to what actually caused it?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It could have come from a number of locations. Yes there are some people, and I think the public, who would have a general opinion on it. Obviously, as a regulatory authority with a requirement to enforce the regulations and the law, we would not be in a position to make an allegation against anybody.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** I am not asking Mr. Fox to make an allegation; I am asking if Inland Fisheries Ireland has a suspicion in relation to the cause of it.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** You have no leads whatsoever.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** None whatsoever.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** None whatsoever. No. Not for that particular event.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** That does not instil much confidence in the general public in terms of IFI's role in such incidents.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** As I have explained to the environment committee and to this committee previously, the nature of this type of discharge pollution is that it can happen a number of days before we see the impacts. Getting the offender can be difficult at times. We have about a 75% success rate in environmental prosecutions.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** I think Mr. Fox will agree it was a catastrophic environmental--  
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**Mr. Barry Fox:** Absolutely.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** -----and ecological disaster in terms of the 32,000 fish killed. Can that happen again?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes, is the honest answer. Yes, it could. It has brought it into very sharp focus nationally. People the length and breadth of the country have asked me about the Blackwater.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** Has Inland Fisheries Ireland learned any lessons from it? Are there measures it can put in place to see if it can have better success in relation to such detections?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** What it is currently being undertaken is that the Minister has directed for an independent review of that fish kill. The joint research committee that is assigned to Europe is doing an independent review of the process. It is going to provide recommendations. We are also in the middle of developing a national protocol with the other agencies that would be involved in these types of investigations and we will have that finalised once we receive the recommendations from the review. That will be published at the end of January and a new protocol will be in place nationally roughly around the same time.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** As Mr. Fox will appreciate, a complete failure of accountability would be the view in relation to this. This is something that caused such a catastrophic impact and there is not even a suspicion as to the causes. It is difficult to believe. I will park it there for now.

Regarding the legal cases that were dropped due to the powers of the officers involved, as I understand it, there are 50 to 60 cases and the estimated cost is about €240,000. Will Mr. Fox tell me what those costs are? Are they legal costs, lost fines, or what are they?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It is 61 cases and it is the legal costs associated with them.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** It does not include anything to do with fines that were not recouped as a result of the cases being dropped?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** What kind of an estimated figure would we have in terms of potential fines that could have come out of those 61 cases?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We talked about it earlier. They range from anything between €250 to €1,000. There is a figure there, certainly.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** Okay. Somewhere between €30,000 to €50,000 is potentially lost income as a result of that. That is in addition to the €240,000 legal fees. One case in particular was on the larger side. Will Mr. Fox provide a bit more detail on that?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That is still for finalisation so the costs are being negotiated at the moment. That is the case that was running since 2017. That had to be withdrawn because it was still a live case.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** When it is described as larger, what does that mean? Why is it larger?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It has been ongoing for quite a while so significant costs have been accrued with it.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** Is it in relation to a more serious incident, for example?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** Yes, it is. Can Mr. Fox give us more details? He does not want to identify the issue, obviously, but is it a serious breach? To what extent is-----

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No. It turned out that there were three parties involved in the case. Two of them were deemed to have not have committed an offence; one had. As they were parties within the prosecution, it was still the three that were involved in the process until it closed out. Due to the delegation issue, we had to withdraw that case. There is now the issue of costs associated with it-----

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** The costs are to be settled.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes, to be settled. It is the costs of the case that we are trying to settle.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** If we were to say the case was to proceed, is it a case that would potentially have a high fine, or high sanction, involved in it?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** That is a matter for the Judiciary to decide but, certainly, we would have expected a significant fine.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** It was on the severe end of the offence list, shall we say?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** Is the overall issue of the powers and the fact that cases are withdrawn done and dusted? There are no further cases that potentially will be impacted or withdrawn. What period did it run from?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It ran from March 2023 to June 2023.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** March 2023 to June 2023.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It was basically live cases running at that time between-----

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** Why did it start in March 2023?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We became aware of the issue when a query came in to the organisation from a defending solicitor asking for a specific piece of delegation. When we went looking for it, it was not available.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** Are cases prior to March 2023 in any jeopardy?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No. It is the same as the Statute of Limitations looking forward. There is a six-month look-back as well.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** So there will be no period prior to that involved.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No.

**An Cathaoirleach:** I have a few concluding questions. On an annual basis, how many protected disclosures would come in against IFI? Last year, for example, how many would Mr. Fox be aware of?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I will ask Ms Campion to answer that question as she would have that information.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** In 2022, we got ten, in 2023 we got six, in 2024 we got 12, and in 2025 here to date we have nine. Previous to that we had none, or very few anyway; maybe one or two.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Not huge volumes, it has to be said. On foot of those protected disclosures, how many external reviews would be initiated annually and how many outcomes of those would come before IFI?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** I have details of that here. In 2023, we did two external reviews, in 2024, one, and in 2025, three to date.

**An Cathaoirleach:** They would be external reviews and the outcomes coming back to IFI.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** Yes.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Again, not huge numbers. Something as important as the external review that was commissioned by the former Minister, the results of which came back before the board to note back in February, obviously appeared on the agenda for that particular meeting. Correct me if I am wrong.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** I was actually aware of it but I thought it was something else you were talking about. I was deputy CEO in March and would have done a report on that.

**An Cathaoirleach:** You would have done a report on the-----

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** On the report that came in.

**An Cathaoirleach:** You had done that report at that stage.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** Yes.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Did you not think that was important information to bring to the committee before now?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** From what my colleagues were saying, I thought it was something else. I was just confused. I am really sorry. It was just when Mr. Fox said what it was, I said that was it. I wanted to clarify that.

**An Cathaoirleach:** So you, as acting CEO at that stage, carried out the report. It was not the body - ARC, is it? - that carried out-----

**Mr. Barry Fox:** ARC.

**An Cathaoirleach:** It was Ms Campion who carried out-----

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** I was not acting CEO when it came in in February. I was head of finance. That has been like a roundabout. It came in in February and I just put together a report of all the different reports that had been done previously and the documentation to help the ARC and the board.

**An Cathaoirleach:** I have been on PAC now for a number of years and I find this meeting the most extraordinary in terms of the lack of preparedness for it on such an important issue and the drip-feeding of very important information before the committee. Whether it is intentional or unintentional I am not quite sure, but I find it extraordinary that, as the last speaker, we now find out that you carried out that report in relation to the external review and the findings in that. Talk us through the process where two of the recommendations were accepted and one was being refuted?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** It was refuted on the basis, as Mr. Fox and Mr. Cusack said, on the timelines of information that we had.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Who had a role in that? That came back before the board, did it?

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** Yes, I gathered all the information that was there previously because I was not involved in it at all.

**An Cathaoirleach:** So it was not ARC. This was you. You brought that information back to the board.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** Yes.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Okay. That disputes what you, Mr. Fox, put on record here in terms of the board having no knowledge whatsoever of the findings of that external review and that it went straight to ARC.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** They are the same people.

**An Cathaoirleach:** They are the same people.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Would you have been part of that process then? Were you involved when that came back to the board? Did you have sight of it?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No, I did not have sight of it at that stage. I was not at the ARC that dealt with that.

**An Cathaoirleach:** I find this extraordinary. You might furnish us with a full note on that because it is an important piece of information and for it to be put before us here when only two members of the committee are here. That information should have been more forthcoming.

**Ms Suzanne Campion:** Apologies, it was confusing.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Fixed charge penalty notices were mentioned earlier on, and a fine of €150. How many fixed penalty notices were issued last year? Do we have that information?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I would say we do. It will be here. The fixed-charge notices for 2024, 2023 and 2022 were 292, 297 and 297, respectively.

**An Cathaoirleach:** What is the collection rate in terms of those notices?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Does the Cathaoirleach mean the value?

**An Cathaoirleach:** Yes, the value or percentage. Is it 100% collection in terms of notices?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** If a fixed-charge penalty notice is not paid, we would initiate court proceedings for the offence.

**An Cathaoirleach:** For all?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes, unless they are out of the country or have not paid events and we cannot locate them. There are a number of cases where we are not able to locate the individual, such as when they have given an incorrect address or have left the country, which can happen on occasion.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Is it the case that Mr. Fox does not have those figures here today?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I do not, no, but I can certainly-----

**An Cathaoirleach:** He might furnish them as to what the collection rate is for each of those years.

I want to turn to a final issue, that is, algae blooms and the impact they have on lakes across the State. The situation in Lough Neagh in the North has been widely aired; that environmental disaster that has unfolded up there. That was ten years in the making and there were systemic failures to address many of the warning signs over the previous ten years.

In my constituency of Wicklow, a number of lakes, including Blessington and Vartry, are hugely important lakes because they provide water not just for Wicklow but also large areas within Dublin. Two of those lakes have had what I can only describe as fairly considerable and serious algae blooms over the past number of years. What role or responsibility does IFI have in the monitoring of algae blooms? What preventative action has been taken or is being taken, and not just in terms of those two, because I know there are other very serious areas of concern also?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I ask Dr Fiona Kelly to give a response.

**Dr. Fiona Kelly:** IFI has no role in the monitoring of algae blooms or water chemistry in lakes. That is a role for the EPA,

**An Cathaoirleach:** Is that solely the role of the EPA? IFI has no role whatsoever even though it does impact on fish.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** The role we have is to carry out monitoring of fish in those lakes.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Is IFI aware of any fish killed as a result of algae blooms in any of our water courses or lakes?

**Dr. Fiona Kelly:** Fish kills do occur in lakes due to nutrient enrichment and algae blooms.

**An Cathaoirleach:** What role does IFI have?

**Dr. Fiona Kelly:** That is where the environmental enforcement investigation team comes in. It will try to investigate that. It is very difficult to identify the source of nutrient enrichment in lakes because it is probably overland flow from agriculture and other sources, such as wastewater treatment plants. We very rarely get a case-----

**An Cathaoirleach:** In terms of IFI's remit, it is obviously to protect the environment or fish. Do the witnesses think its remit should include the monitoring and protection of our lakes? It is a serious issue. I see it playing out in my own constituency, as I alluded to there. Do our witnesses think that remit is expansive enough to address what is a growing and very serious issue of concern?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We have quite a narrow role in regards to water quality enforcement, and we are working with the Department to expand that. We have put a number of recommendations to the Department as to what we would like to progress. The Cathaoirleach is right. To answer his question, there is an opportunity for us to be more involved. The monitoring and classification of water bodies, however, will remain a matter for the EPA.

**An Cathaoirleach:** I have one concluding question and it relates to a fish kill on the Aughrim river, again in Wicklow. It was July of last year, in 2024, when there was a fairly considerable kill of fish. Were any prosecutions taken as a result of that? Do we know the cause of that particular fish kill?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes. It was a wood treatment facility on the banks of the Aughrim river. I actually visited that fish kill as the head of operations at the time. That is a perfect example of where the IFI cannot prosecute. We were pretty certain of where the discharge came from, because white diffuse came down through the river bank and because it was highly toxic, it killed a significant amount of fish in a stretch. On further investigation with the EPA, the facility owners confirmed they had a discharge from that location in breach of their EPA licence. The EPA took the prosecution with the support of the IFI.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Was that a successful prosecution?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Why was it the EPA that prosecuted and not IFI?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** It occurred within its licensed site. It was authorised to take that prosecution because IFI could not detect a discharge. We have to find a live discharge or be able to tie that

discharge right back to the pipe that it comes out of. Without that evidence we will not be able to progress to a successful outcome.

**An Cathaoirleach:** In that particular case, correct me if I am wrong, there was a final €5,000 fine imposed.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I do not have the figure in my head, but yes, there was.

**An Cathaoirleach:** That is considerably low.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes. I have been on the record a number of times saying the penalties do not fit the crime in these areas and that we need a significant review of that.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Are there fixed penalties?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** No, they are awarded by the courts. However, we need to start looking at the classification of fines and trying to align those to the offences.

**An Cathaoirleach:** To go back to the algae bloom, the witnesses said they put forward a number of recommendations to the Department in areas they think would strengthen the work, role and remit of IFI as an organisation, given considerable issues in terms of governance and legacy and all of that, while still having a hugely important and significant role to play in terms of our environment, fish and so on. The IFI might furnish us with what they put forward to the Department on the remit of IFI, and the areas they think should be looked at.

**Mr. Barry Fox:** We can give that detail now if the Cathaoirleach would like.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Mr. Fox might furnish it to the committee.

**Deputy James Geoghegan:** To echo what the Cathaoirleach said, I really feel that the witnesses' testimony today and how they interacted with some of our lines of questioning brings into question the credibility of a lot of what we have heard here today. I do not think it has done anything to restore confidence in the organisation. I find it really troubling to be honest how the witnesses have responded to some questions here. I am new as a TD but I have not seen it before.

On the documents, can we get a copy of the Department's external investigation that was provided to Ms Campion and then to the board and the ARC? I am referring to the external investigation into the protected disclosure of the driver of the uninsured vehicle. Can we get a copy of that document?

Can we also get a copy of all minutes at a board or a sub-committee board level that dealt with or addressed this issue, along with any documents that were compiled in respect of this, either by the witnesses or whoever, in respect of the report that was made that refutes the clear findings in the external report? Can they furnish those documents to this committee?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** I will address that, yes.

**An Cathaoirleach:** I have one quick question and a yes-no answer will suffice. Did the witnesses get media training before they came before us today?

**Mr. Barry Fox:** Yes.

**An Cathaoirleach:** Okay. Maybe that should be reassessed, because certainly it has been difficult trying to extrapolate some information.

That concludes our engagement with Inland Fisheries Ireland. I thank the deputy chief executive officer and his officials for attending. I also thank the officials from the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment and the C and AG for their attendance once again. Is it agreed that the clerk will seek any follow-up information? Agreed.

The next PAC meeting is scheduled for 9:30 a.m. on Thursday 11 December, when the committee will engage with the Office of the Revenue Commissioners.

*The witnesses withdrew.*

The committee adjourned at 2 p.m. until 9.30 a.m. on Thursday, 11 December 2025.