

## Written Answers.

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**The following are questions tabled by Members for written response and the ministerial replies as received on the day from the Departments [unrevised].**

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 9, inclusive, answered orally.*

*Questions Nos. 10 to 30, inclusive, resubmitted.*

*Questions Nos. 31 to 40, inclusive, answered orally.*

### Organic Farming Scheme Data

41. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay of a year to get back to applicants for the organic farming scheme under tranche 2 if only 175 farmers applied; the number of applicants who were successful overall and in County Donegal, respectively; the amount of funding provided for the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49078/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The current budget of €56m allocated to fund all Organic Farming Schemes during the period of the current Rural Development Programme is the largest allocation ever to an Organic Farming support scheme.

The area of land under organic production has expanded dramatically as a direct result of my Department's investment. Latest figures indicate that there are now some 72,000 hectares under organic production, an increase of nearly 50% on the position at the start of the Programme in 2014.

Indeed, the target for the RDP was to attract some 16,000 hectares of new land into production and to support 46,000 hectares of converted land. These targets have been more than exceeded

The Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) was re-opened in November 2018 on a targeted basis on foot of the recommendation of the Organic Sector Strategy Group. Following assessment by the Group and based on market demand and supply deficits in organic horticulture, cereals and dairy, the Group recommended the re-opening of the OFS targeting expenditure towards sectors in deficit. Selection criteria which would facilitate such a targeted reopening were agreed by the Group.

The eligibility process required applicants to submit a BPS application (by 15 May 2019) and a certificate of completion of an Approved Training Course. The determination of eligible applications and the ranking and selection process could only commence following the deadline for receipt of the mandatory educational certification which was 1 September, 2019.

A total of 225 applications were received by the closing date for applications. 58 applications were either withdrawn or deemed ineligible. Following the ranking and selection process,

one applicant withdrew, 55 were successful and 111 farmers were unsuccessful. One of the successful farmers is from Donegal.

It is important to note that this is a targeted re-opening and that I would fully expect that there will be a new Organics scheme under the next CAP. I would encourage all stakeholders to make their views known on the shape of this future scheme as part of the wider CAP consultation process.

*Questions Nos. 42 to 45, inclusive, answered orally.*

### **Animal Welfare**

46. **Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether China and Pakistan are among the countries that do not meet welfare standards here; if he and the Irish Greyhound Board are opposed to direct or indirect exports to these countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48989/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Bord na gCon is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. Bord na gCon continues to advise owners to only export to destinations that provide the expected levels of greyhound welfare in its Code of Practice. I fully endorse this view.

The rules covering the movement of all breeds of dogs, including greyhounds, between EU Member States are currently set at a European level rather than as a national measure in isolation.

My Department does not certify exports to China or Pakistan.

Bord na gCon has informed me that potential solutions to the indirect export of greyhounds to unsuitable destinations have been discussed through the International Greyhound Welfare Forum which includes national and international welfare agencies. This may require any further legislative changes to be sponsored at a European level.

### **Fish Landings**

47. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to recommence the weighing of pelagic species at point of landing; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the weighing of pelagic fish species at point of landing is a flawed approach; if his attention has been further drawn to the serious consequences for the quality of fish; if the sector has been consulted on the matter; if so, when such meetings took place; the discussions he has had with the control authority; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49071/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Commission asked Ireland to conduct a formal administrative inquiry to evaluate its capacity to apply the rules of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). This came as a result of “the severe and significant weaknesses detected in the Irish control system” during an audit carried out by the Commission in Killybegs, in 2018. Principally, the Commission identified shortcomings related to the effective control of pelagic fisheries, issues related to underreporting of catches of these species, the inadequate and ineffective sanctioning system for offences committed by operators

and the lack of control and enforcement of bluefin tuna catches by recreational vessels.

The formal administrative inquiry requires Ireland to provide further substantial volume of information on these specific findings to enable the Commission to further evaluate Ireland's capacity to apply the rules of the CFP and to assess the potential consequences of any failure to do so. The Commission will analyse the information provided by Ireland and identify any further steps or actions necessary. A similar type investigation in another Member State in relation to pelagic controls resulted in significant quota reductions.

As Minister, I have no role in the operational control matters which formed the Audit findings. The monitoring and control of fishing vessels within Ireland's Exclusive Fisheries Zone are matters for the Irish control authorities. Under the Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act, 2006, all operational issues of this nature concerning sea fisheries control are, as a matter of law, exclusively for the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority and the Naval Service. The issues arising in the administrative inquiry are operational matters for SFPA and, as Minister, I am precluded from getting involved in these matters.

The information required by the Commission includes large amounts of primary data. I understand that the SFPA have had a number of meetings with DG Mare to keep them abreast of progress. Department officials have had regular meeting with the SFPA from a corporate governance and policy perspective. I am advised that the SFPA is also liaising with stakeholders on the issues arising from the inquiry.

### **Horse Racing Industry**

48. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of horses injured and killed at racecourses and point-to-point events here to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48988/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Horse Racing Ireland (HRI) is a commercial state body established under the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act, 2001, and is responsible for the overall administration, promotion and development of the horse racing industry. The Irish Horseracing Regulatory Board (IHRB) is the regulatory body for all horseracing in Ireland. The Board is a company limited by guarantee set up by the Turf Club and the Irish National Hunt Steeplechase Committee for the purpose of carrying out the regulatory and licensing functions for Irish horseracing.

The HRI and IHRB have informed me that 128 horses have been fatally injured racing at point-to-points and Irish racecourses to date this year. This figure represents 0.38% of the 33,746 runners in the same period and, given the mix of racing in Ireland (flat and national hunt) is consistent with other major racing jurisdictions.

The IHRB have also informed me that it is impractical to ascertain the number of injuries at racecourses/point-to-points. The timing of the injury will not always be obvious at the racecourse - for example, a horse could be injured when travelling to/from racecourses from the trainers yard. They may be withdrawn at a racecourse as a result of an injury sustained in previous days which is only apparent at a later time.

In common with other jurisdictions, the Irish racing authorities take equine welfare extremely seriously. The focus is to minimise the risk of injury to horse and jockey as much possible by ensuring that every link in the chain of care that surrounds our horses is a strong one.

On the race track, clerks of the course, employed by the IHRB and therefore, independent of

the racecourses, work closely with the management of each track to maximise the safety of the course for horse and jockey. Many new initiatives have taken place in recent years in areas such as track surfaces, irrigation policies, hurdle and fence design and race surface maintenance.

Horses receive first class veterinary care at the track, from the vets providing first aid, from the Blue Cross and from the independent IHRB regulatory veterinary team. Every race meeting must have at least three veterinary surgeons present. There are pre-race risk-based inspections, appropriate and timely first aid in the event of an injury and careful follow up around each horse on the raceday itself.

I am satisfied therefore that adequate precautions are in place to protect horses as far as is practicable.

## **Beef Industry**

49. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the work of the beef task force in addressing its objectives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49121/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As the Deputy will be aware, the inaugural Beef Taskforce meeting scheduled for 14th October was prevented from proceeding. However, since then the independent chair and my Department continue to engage proactively with Taskforce members with a view to both progressing the implementation of the provisions of the agreement.

My Department and its agencies continue to progress the commitments which they signed up to under the Agreement. The full text of the Agreement between beef sector stakeholders, along with an update on the progress made on the action points to date, is available on my Department's website: <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmingsectors/beef/beeftaskforce/>

An immediate increase in a range of bonuses was announced as part of the 15 September Agreement. It has been confirmed to my Department that this bonus system is now in place.

Initiatives in the Agreement aimed at improving information along the supply chain included the commissioning of the following reports: an independent review of market and customer requirements; an independent examination of the price composition of the total value of the animal along the supply chain; and a summary of competition law issues as relevant to the Irish beef sector. My Department has issued the Request for Tender for these reports, with a deadline for receipt of Tender Responses of 12 noon on Thursday 5th December. This will enable award of the tender before the end of 2019.

In relation to market transparency initiatives, my Department:

- has published an expert report on mechanical carcass classification review;
- has introduced an appeals system for manual grading; and
- has initiated a consultation process on the transposition of the Unfair Trading Practices (UTP) Directive, with a deadline for submission of 13 December.

Bord Bia has developed a beef market price index model based on 3 components: cattle price index, beef market price index (retail and wholesale) and an offal price indicator. This is now available on the Bord Bia website: <https://www.bordbia.ie/farmers-growers/farmers/prices-markets/beef-market-tracking/>

Teagasc is significantly advanced in the first stage of the scientific review of the Quality Payment Grid(QPS).

My Department is also proactively engaging with several potential beef Producer Organisations, which have to potential to strengthen the bargaining power of beef farmers in the supply chain. Two beef producer organisations have been formally recognised by my Department in recent months.

I established the Beef Market Taskforce to provide the leadership to develop a sustainable pathway for the future of the beef sector in terms of economic, environmental and social sustainability. As I have previously stated, it is in the interests of everyone involved in the beef sector that the work of the Taskforce goes ahead. I hope that all parties will agree to come together around the table as soon as possible in order to progress this important work.

*Question No. 50 answered orally.*

### **Artisan Food Sector**

51. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to promote the local food trade here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49051/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Artisan and speciality food businesses can have a significant impact on local rural economies and their importance is acknowledged in the Food Wise 2025 strategy. Growth prospects for the sector are positive overall, driven by increased consumer interest in the provenance of food, environmental concerns, health and a desire to support the local economy.

A range of supports for this particular sector is available both from my Department and in links with other Government Departments.

I understand that approximately 500 artisan and speciality food companies with a turnover of between €100,000 to €3.5m are registered with Bord Bia for supports and services they offer, include marketing assistance, specialised training, capacity building and promotion.

Funding under the Rural Innovation & Development Fund is provided by my Department for initiatives designed to promote agri-food tourism in rural areas. Agri-food tourism broadly is the practice of offering an activity or activities in rural areas to visit areas of well-known agricultural produce and to sample and taste the local or regional cuisine or specialties. It also encompasses local food, farmer and artisan market schemes that support and are paired with local and seasonal food producers and artisan crafts. Following the 2019 call for proposals, I announced funding totalling €243,000 for twelve agri-food tourism projects in June this year.

Last year, together with my colleague the Minister for Rural and Community Development, I launched the 'LEADER Food Initiative'. This funding is provided from my Department under the Rural Development Programme (RDP), and is delivered using the LEADER methodology via the Department of Rural and Community Development. It supports new and existing artisan, micro and small food producers to address emerging challenges through investment in areas such as capital equipment, market development, competitiveness and innovation. I understand that 34 projects with a total value of more than €1.9 million have been approved under the Scheme to date.

The Department of Business Enterprise and Innovation also provide funding for local food

initiatives through the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs), thirty one dedicated teams located in the Local Authorities nationwide which provide expert advice and guidance to all small businesses.

Taken together, all of these initiatives support farm and local community diversification and help farmers and small food businesses to connect with the wider community. From a Government perspective, they provide a collaborative framework for different Departments and agencies to work together for the development of the Small Business food sector.

### **Alternative Farm Enterprises**

52. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to support the growing of biomass crops; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48915/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Through the All-of-Government Climate Action Plan, my Department is working closely with other government Departments to ensure Ireland's transition to a low carbon economy and society. While agriculture contributes to the increasing concentration of greenhouse gases, the sector also has the means to be part of the alleviation process and has a key role to play in transitioning to a competitive, low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050.

Ireland's long-term policy vision for the agriculture and land use sector is 'an approach to carbon neutrality which does not compromise the capacity for sustainable food production'.

While carbon neutrality is yet to be fully defined, our policy approach is based on three principles:

- Reducing agriculture emissions;
- Increasing carbon sequestration; and
- The displacement and substitution of fossil fuel and energy intensive materials.

Indigenous renewable energy plays a vital role in our domestic fuel mix and will become even more important in the context of reducing our reliance on imported fuels and in meeting our challenging renewable energy targets for 2020 and 2030 and decarbonising our energy systems by 2050.

Ireland has a 16% target for renewable energy by 2020 and the production of indigenous biomass has a crucial role to play in helping us meet this renewable energy target and my Department has a key role to play in the supply of biomass materials in this regard.

Through the forestry programme, my Department is committed to increasing the supply of biomass from Ireland's forests. In 2018, 40% of the wood fibre used in Ireland was used for energy generation, mainly within the forest products sector, up from 34% a couple of years ago. This represents over 1.5 million cubic metres of wood fibre and includes, roundwood, sawmill and residues such as bark, sawdust and woodchip. The new Support Scheme for Renewable Heat is creating additional demand for biomass particular since the second phase was launched during the summer which will provide operational support for biomass boilers.

According to the All Ireland Roundwood Forecast 2016 – 2035, output from Irish forests is expected to double over the coming decades to around 8 million cubic metres. Most of this increased production will come from private forest owners. In fact, during 2018 total timber

production from private forest owners exceeded 1 million cubic metres for the first time. In order to address the barriers that exist in mobilising this resource, my Department supports a number of targeted measures including the construction of forest roads to provide access to the timber, knowledge transfer groups to assist forest owners in managing their forests and grants for second thinning of broadleaves which provides an important source of local firewood.

The Department did previously operate a bioenergy scheme to facilitate the establishment of energy crops (including willow and miscanthus) for use in renewable energy production. However, due to a low uptake, the scheme was suspended from 2016 and there are currently no plans to re-introduce support. On-going support for the production of biomass will continue to be provided under the Forestry Programme 2014-2020 which funds private afforestation and includes a specific “forestry for fibre” scheme.

My Department continues to consider all opportunities for further developments in the area of biomass in the context of the next Forestry Programme and the next CAP Strategic programme, which is currently being developed.

### **Food Promotion**

53. **Deputy Eamon Ryan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to support local food production with particular reference to small farms and facilitating the production of vegetables. [49104/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department supports vegetable producers by means of grant aid provided through the Scheme of Investment Aid for the development of the commercial horticulture sector. This scheme provides grant aid towards capital investments in specialised plant and equipment as well as emerging technologies specific to commercial horticulture production. Under this scheme, aid at a rate of 40% (or a maximum rate of 50% in the case of young farmers) is payable on the accepted cost of approved capital investments or equipment. This Scheme is 100% funded by the Irish Government.

My Department has just received EU approval to continue this valuable and important grant aid scheme in 2020 and monies have been provided in my Department’s budgetary allocation for this.

At a broader level, the EU Producer Organisation Scheme which my Department also operates, contributes important support for the fruit and vegetable sector. This scheme which is 100% EU funded provides an important mechanism for producers to achieve a more sustainable balance in the supply chain through collaboration and enhancing bargaining power by becoming part of a larger supply base. Producer members can claim 50% EU aid on approved actions and investments implemented through Producer Organisations, including fruit and vegetable production.

### **Animal Disease Controls**

54. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will report on his forthcoming TB eradication strategy; the way in which it proposes to reduce the incidence of the disease here while continuing to support farmers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49120/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department's TB eradication Programme aims to drive bovine TB (bTB) disease levels down towards the target of eradication by 2030. It is focussed on measures which will further reduce transmission of bTB. In the coming weeks, I will be launching a renewed strategy underpinned by the principle of supporting and empowering farmers to reduce the bTB risk to their cattle by making informed choices to protect their herd and their neighbour's herds. Equally, there is a particular focus on assisting herdowners whose herds are affected with bTB and to clear their herds of infection.

Stakeholders have recognised that further preventative measures are required if the ambition of eradication by 2030 is to be achieved. Steadily reducing the risk of disease transmission is the best way in which support can be provided to all Irish farmers – those whose herds are impacted by bTB and critically those whose herds are clear and who wish to remain free of the disease. The recommendations made by the bTB Stakeholders Forum will inform the development of this strategy, and stakeholder involvement and leadership will continue to be critical to successfully eradicating bTB.

The risks associated with each potential transmission channel will be reduced through a series of coordinated measures, which will be applied in addition to the existing programme and in full compliance with the EU requirements for bTB eradication.

While the strategy is still being finalised, some of its central themes will be:

1. Reducing the spread of bTB via cattle to cattle transmission.
2. Reduce transmission at the cattle/wildlife interface
3. Improving farmers' understanding of risk with clearer communication
4. Greater stakeholder leadership, ownership and involvement; and
5. Continually improve programme effectiveness through review and amendments

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2019-11-27\_pq54-27-11-2019\_en.docx ">info</a>]

### **Bord na gCon Funding**

55. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will direct Bord na gCon to increase its funding to an organisation (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48912/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Bord na gCon is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Bord na gCon contributed €106,000 to the Irish Retired Greyhound Trust's total income of €242,000 in 2018, with 2% of all winning prize money also going towards the IRGT. 1,021 retired greyhounds were rehomed with IRGT assistance in 2018, both here in Ireland and abroad.

Recently, in an effort to increase and promote domestic greyhound rehoming, the IRGT, supported by Bord na gCon, confirmed an increase in financial support to private rehoming

agencies for the rehoming of retired racing greyhounds in Ireland. Rehoming agencies will now be offered an additional €100 per retired greyhound rehomed in Ireland to encourage and further facilitate domestic rehoming. This support assists with the veterinary costs involved in preparing a retired greyhound for rehoming, neutering/spaying, a rabies shot and other vaccinations and inoculations.

In August 2019, Bord na gCon announced the establishment of a separate Care Fund dedicated to funding a variety of initiatives for the care and welfare of the greyhound, including various rehoming initiatives in conjunction with the Irish Retired Greyhound Trust.

It is estimated that a sum of €740,000 will be generated for the Care Fund in 2020, with a percentage of admission and restaurant entries, Tote income and existing sponsorship money accruing the total sum. This combined with the funding generated in the latter part of 2019 will ensure a dedicated fund in excess of €1 million for care and welfare initiatives throughout next year.

### **Animal Welfare Bodies**

**56. Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will increase funding to an organisation (details supplied) to enable it to expand its mobile veterinary clinic services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48913/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Since 1995, my Department has provided ex-gratia funding to animal charities to assist in their work in animal care and welfare. This funding is in recognition of the valuable work being done by these organisations.

In December 2018, I announced record funding awards of €2.75m to 108 animal welfare organisations throughout the country, including to the organisation named. The organisations supported and the amounts allocated for each of the past 4 years are available on the Department's website.

<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/animalhealthwelfare/animalwelfare/fundingtoanimalwelfareorganisations/>

Since 2009, the organisation in question has received significant levels of ex-gratia funding from my Department, which has assisted them in their work in providing care and veterinary assistance to animals in need, and also towards the costs incurred in recent improvements to their facilities which are due to officially open shortly.

An advertisement was placed in the national press earlier this year inviting applications from welfare bodies for funding in respect of their activities in 2020. These applications are assessed and awards made on the basis of certain criteria, including the level and type of assistance provided by the organisation in the delivery of care and welfare services to animals and the level of funding raised from other sources to support welfare activities.

Organisations applying for funding must sign up to a strict set of guidelines, be in existence for two years or more, be registered with the Charities Regulator and provide detailed accounts. Organisations with income in excess of €100,000 must submit audited accounts.

To date, 110 applications have been received. The organisation named has submitted an application for funding this year setting out their current and future plans for promoting animal welfare and this is currently being processed by my officials. A decision on funding levels for

all applicants will be made shortly.

### **Basic Payment Scheme Payments**

57. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason for the delay in making BPS payments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49008/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department has received over 122,000 applications this year from farmers with entitlements under the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), which is funded by the EU and is worth approximately €1.2 billion annually.

Under EU Regulations, all applications must be subjected to robust administrative checks prior to payment. The main element of the administrative check is an area assessment. This is achieved by using the detailed database of individual land parcels - the Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS). The LPIS database currently holds details relating to one million individual land parcels and must be kept fully updated in order to underpin payments.

The Department's systems in this critical area must meet demanding EU and national audit requirements. Only valid applications under the BPS that fully comply with the requirements of the EU legislation are paid. Consequently, all applications under the schemes are subject to extensive administrative checks including Ground or Remote Sensing (Satellite) inspections.

Cases that do not pass the validation process go into error and cannot be paid pending a resolution of the error concerned. Examples of these errors include over-claims, dual claims, commonage errors and issues relating to herd number ownership changes. My Department enters into correspondence, mainly through the issuing of query letters to farmers, in order to resolve these error cases.

The EU Regulations prescribe the minimum number of inspections that must take place annually. These inspections can be undertaken by means of field visits on the ground or by means of Remote Sensing using up-to-date satellite imagery. The Regulations further prescribe that, for inspection cases, the process must be fully completed before any payments can issue. Where an application is selected for inspection under any of the area-based schemes, the outcome of that inspection applies to all schemes for which the applicant has applied.

Approximately 8,000 applications are subject to an inspection in 2019 under the various area-based schemes. As of 25 November, my Department had received inspection results for over 93% of these inspections, of which 92% had been advanced to payment stage.

I am pleased to confirm that the BPS advance payment commenced as scheduled on 16 October. This is the earliest that payments can commence under the governing EU Regulations. The advance payment issued at the increased rate of 70% again this year.

In all, an advance payment worth some €747 million issued to 114,500 farmers on the first pay run, representing an increase of 1,500 farmers paid at the same stage in 2018. Some 94% of eligible applicants for the 2019 BPS received their advance payment at the earliest date possible.

Payments have continued to issue as additional cases have become clear for payment and 119,135 applicants have now been paid €786 million under the 2019 BPS. This represents 97.5% of eligible applicants. Where a farmer has not yet responded to a query letter from my

Department, I would encourage them to reply at an early date in order to facilitate payment.

Preparations are currently well underway to facilitate the second instalment of BPS payments, which will commence on 2 December.

### **Organic Farming Scheme Eligibility**

58. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the various changes made to the minimum qualifying score for admittance into the organic farming scheme; the minimum qualifying score; the reason for the changes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49079/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Organic Farming Scheme is one of the most successful schemes under our current Rural Development Programme. The Scheme has more than achieved its targets in terms of new land converted and the maintenance of organic land.

As a further vote of confidence in the organics sector by this Government, my colleague Minister Doyle established an Organic Sector Strategy Group last year, comprising relevant stakeholders and state bodies. The Group recommended re-opening the Scheme but on a targeted basis. The sectors targeted were those for which there is a clear market demand, and which are critical to the further development of the Organic Sector, namely horticulture, cereals and dairy. Selection criteria with revised marking, which would facilitate such a targeted re-opening, were agreed by the Group. In assessing the case for re-opening the Scheme, the Group recognised that the budget was very limited given the success of the current scheme and the overall spending within the RDP.

The terms and conditions of the Organic Farming Scheme state that an applicant must reach a minimum ranking of 25 marks to be deemed eligible for consideration for inclusion in the Scheme. They further state that the number of applications to be accepted into the Scheme will be determined by funding; the submission of a valid application does not guarantee entry to the Scheme. No changes were made to the minimum ranking of 25 marks - it is the same as in previous OFS under the current RDP. Once applicants reached the minimum ranking of 25 and met the other eligibility criteria, they were then assessed under the Ranking and Selection system in accordance with the criteria agreed by the Organic Sector Strategy Group.

It is important to note that this was a targeted re-opening and that I fully expect that there will be a new Organics Scheme under the next CAP. I would encourage all stakeholders to make their views known on the shape of this future scheme as part of the wider CAP consultation process.

### **Organic Farming Scheme**

59. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the approval rate for applications to the organic farming scheme when it re-opened for 30 days in November 2018. [49060/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) was re-opened in November 2018 on a targeted basis on foot of the recommendation of the Organic Sector Strategy Group. Following assessment by the Group and based on market demand and supply deficits in organic horticulture, cereals and dairy, the

Group recommended the re-opening of the OFS targeting expenditure towards sectors in deficit. Selection criteria which would facilitate such a targeted reopening were agreed by the Group.

The Organic Strategy Group, comprising a range of stakeholders, in assessing the case for re-opening the Scheme, focussed on the current production profile of the Irish Organic Sector and market opportunities. The Group concluded that while the area under organic production has increased, production patterns are not fully aligned with market opportunities. Most organic farmers are engaged in beef and/or sheep production with a relatively low number engaged in tillage and dairy. However, market demand and supply deficits were in the areas of dairy, horticulture and cereals.

Based on this research and analysis of the current profile of the Irish Organic Sector, the Organic Strategy Group therefore concluded that the key to long term sustainable growth is to ensure that the development of organic production is aligned to market requirements and consumer demand. To this end, it was decided that the sectors to be targeted in a re-opened Organic Farming Scheme should be horticulture, dairy and tillage.

Of the 55 applications that were accepted, almost 70% have one of the three targeted areas as their main enterprise. The other applications that were accepted all have land under one of the targeted areas albeit not as their main enterprise. Of those that were unsuccessful, 95% come from outside of the targeted sectors.

This re-opening was targeted at certain production areas and I am satisfied that the successful applicants will help ensure further sustainable growth in the organic sector.

### **Agriculture Scheme Payments**

60. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if payments under the basic payments scheme and areas of natural constraints scheme are delayed; if so, the way in which he plans to address delays; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49122/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department has received over 130,000 applications this year from farmers under the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC), Scheme which are funded or partially funded by the EU and are worth in excess of €1.4 billion annually.

There are no delays in the issuing of payments to applicants with clear and validated applications under either scheme. Ireland remains to the forefront of Member States in relation to the early payment of monies under the BPS and ANC schemes.

Under EU Regulations, all applications must be subjected to robust administrative checks, including Ground or Remote Sensing (Satellite) inspections where applicable, prior to payment. The main element of the administrative check is an area assessment. This is achieved by using the detailed database of individual land parcels - the Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS). The LPIS database currently holds details relating to 1 million individual land parcels and must be kept fully updated in order to underpin payments.

The Department's systems in this critical area must meet demanding EU and national audit requirements. Only valid applications under the BPS and ANC that fully comply with the requirements of the EU Legislation are paid. Consequently, all applications under the schemes are subject to administrative checks.

Cases that do not pass the validation process cannot be paid pending a resolution of the error concerned. These errors include over-claims, dual claims, commonage errors and issues relating to stocking density requirements. My Department enters into correspondence, mainly through the issuing of query letters to farmers, in order to resolve these error cases.

The EU Regulations prescribe the minimum number of inspections that must take place annually. These inspections can be undertaken by means of field visits on the ground or by means of Remote Sensing using up-to-date satellite imagery. The Regulations further prescribe that, for inspection cases, the process must be fully completed before any payments can issue. Where an application is selected for inspection under any of the area-based schemes, the outcome of that inspection applies to all schemes for which the applicant has applied.

Approximately 8,000 applications are subject to an inspection in 2019 under the various area-based schemes. As of 25 November, my Department had received inspection results for over 93% of these inspections, of which 92% had been advanced to payment stage. The balance of these cases falls into a number of categories, namely, where applicants have been notified of the inspection outcome where an area over-declaration has been identified and a response is awaited; and where applicants have chosen to submit comments on notified inspection outcomes. These cases are currently being examined with a view to final processing. The remaining, outstanding inspection results are currently being finalised and will then be advanced through the final stages of processing promptly.

In relation to the BPS, I am pleased to confirm that advance payment issued as scheduled on 16 October. This is the earliest date that payments can commence under the governing EU Regulations, and the increased advance rate of 70% was paid again this year.

A total advance payment worth some €747 million issued to 114,500 farmers on the first BPS pay run, representing an increase of 1,500 farmers paid at the same stage in 2018. In all, some 94% of eligible applicants for the 2019 BPS received their advance payment at the earliest date possible.

Advance payments under the ANC Scheme also commenced on schedule this year. In the week beginning 16th September, payments in excess of €168 million issued to almost 79,000 farmers, which is an additional 2,000 farmers compared to the same date last year.

Further to changes in EU Regulations from 2019, payments under the ANC scheme must be delivered in two instalments, with 85% advance payments issuing initially and a 15% balancing payment issuing from early December.

I am conscious of the many challenges currently faced by farmers and, with this in mind, I secured additional funding of €23 million in Budget 2019 to bring the overall annual budget for the ANC scheme up to €250 million. This is the second year in a row that the allocation for the ANC Scheme has been substantially increased, and the increased funding has again been targeted at the areas of highest constraint.

In both the BPS and ANC schemes, payments have continued to issue as additional cases have become clear for payment. Under the BPS, 119,135 applicants have now been paid €786 million and for ANC almost 92,000 applicants have been paid in excess of €195 million. Where a farmer has not yet responded to a query letter from my Department, I would encourage them to reply at an early date in order to facilitate payment. It should also be noted that, in relation to the ANC scheme, many farmers will not yet have met their stocking density requirements and will thus not become eligible for payment until they do so later in the year.

The balancing payments for both the ANC and BPS schemes are due to commence in early

December, and preparations in this regard are well underway.

### **Forestry Sector**

61. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the recommendation made by the Youth Assembly to guarantee that 10% of agricultural land is reserved for forestry to increase the overall forest cover here, which is below the EU average. [49011/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I would like first of all to congratulate the participants in the youth assembly forum and to commend their interest in expanding Ireland's overall forest cover. There has been a significant expansion in the forest estate from 1% at the turn of the 20th century to 770,000 hectares or 11% today, but this is indeed well short of the EU average. It is our clear intention, as outlined in the Climate Action Plan, to increase this percentage by facilitating the planting of 8,000 hectares per year.

Support for afforestation is delivered through the generous grants and premiums available, across 12 different planting categories which offer real options to suit every landowner. Under this afforestation scheme, my Department covers 100% of the cost of establishing new forests and also provides annual premium payments which are paid for 15 years. It is notable that during the course of the Forestry Programme so far, this approach has resulted in 2,500 farmers planting a total of 16,000 hectares of forestry on their land.

In relation to setting aside 10% of agricultural land for forestry, I believe that farmers must make choices that suit their individual farming enterprises. I would rather present forestry as a viable option for farmers to supplement their farming enterprise, rather than having a compulsory set aside area.

However, we will be introducing a new forestry programme in due course, and that will provide an opportunity to review the current schemes and configure them to maximise the incentive to plant forestry.

### **Fish Quotas**

62. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which north west scientific quota for herring impacts on the Lough Foyle herring fishery; his view on whether it should be managed separately; if vessels and skippers have to show tract record specifically on that fishery in order to have received a quota allocation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49081/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The boundary line between the herring stock in 5b,6b and 6aN (6aN) and the herring stock in 6aSouth, 7b and 7c (6aS 7bc) is along the 7degree west line which cuts through the Foyle. Although they are considered to be separate stocks, herring in the southern part of 6a and 7bc is combined with that from the northern part of 6a by ICES for the purposes of assessment. This is because the survey and catch data that informs the assessment includes mixed aggregations of herring. Currently, work is underway to determine markers (genetic and physical) which may be used to separate the stocks in the survey and in any potential mixed catches.

As herring in both stock areas are in a depleted state, ICES has advised zero catches since 2016 for each. However, ICES also advises that a low level of catch could be taken to facilitate

sampling of the stock in support of the stock assessment and the ongoing genetic work on stock identity.

The EU set a TAC of 5,800 t each year from 2016-2019 with 4,170 t allocated to 6aN and 1,630 t allocated to 6aS 7bc. The proposal for 2020 is 17% decrease for both areas to bring the TACs into line with ICES advice. The herring caught in the Foyle cannot be considered a separate herring stock and there is no case that it should be subject to a separate TAC and quota regime. The 7W meridian which divides the two stock areas cuts through the Foyle, much of Lough Foyle is west of 7W and thus can be considered as part of the 6aS 7bc TAC area.

The 2012 herring management policy has been set aside because this is a scientific data collection fishery which is being made available to support sampling to provide a more accurate picture of the state of the stock. The arrangements in place for 2019 have been discussed and proposed by industry following a meeting of industry stakeholders held on 26 July 2019. The arrangements provide opportunities for 19 under 12m vessels which did not have a track record under the 2012 herring policy. Other category of vessels in the fishery were required to have the track record as set down in the 2012 policy. Vessels were invited to book into the fishery and were selected by lottery. The fishery opened on 28 October.

### Forestry Sector

63. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to make forestry a more attractive option for farmers. [49107/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I recognise that farmer engagement is vital to the success of the national afforestation programme and that their active participation over the years has increased Ireland's forest cover significantly. The supports currently offered under the forestry programme cover 100% of the cost of establishing new forests and also provides annual premium payments which are paid each year for 15 years. For native woodlands, these annual premiums can be as high as €680 per hectare. We will continue to offer these supports, which can and have been used by farmers as income which supplements their farming enterprise.

It is my firm belief that the concept of "farm forestry" should remain at the heart of our promotion of forestry to farmers. This is to say that forestry becomes part of the farm enterprise alongside other production and not necessarily the sole enterprise. This is key to diversifying the farmer's income.

We also provide generous supports for farmers and other landowners after they have planted. These support measures include funding for the construction of forests roads, thinning of broadleaves and knowledge transfer groups. During the current year, my Department introduced a number of new schemes to further promote forestry. These included a second grant for thinning broadleaves, supports for transitioning to a continuous cover forestry management model and a new Woodland Environmental Fund.

I accept that, in recent times, fewer farmers have opted for forestry. This can be attributed to a variety of reasons, some of which relate to competing sources of income and other considerations such as a negative perception of forestry, an attachment to conventional farming and a perception that there are significant administrative and technical barriers to approval.

As regards other barriers to farmers planting, we are currently reviewing the COFORD Forestry Land Availability Implementation Report recommendations in this regard. We will also have an opportunity under the next CAP to integrate forestry more fully across our agricultural

schemes and to promote the inclusion of farm forestry as part of a successful farming enterprise.

Finally, I am committed to promoting the many multifunctional benefits of forestry. We are funding 15 promotional projects throughout the country as well as Teagasc initiatives which provide advice directly to farmers on how to incorporate forestry into their holdings and how to manage their forest asset.

### **Genetically Modified Organisms**

64. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to prohibit the cultivation of genetically modified organisms here, including the importation of GMO grain. [48951/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As the Deputy will be aware, the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (supported by the Environmental Protection Agency) is responsible for the authorisation of GM crops for cultivation, while my Department regulates its use, once authorised. Additionally, my Department has responsibility for the regulation of EU authorised GMO's used in animal feed.

In respect of cultivation, in 2018, the Government approved the transposition of Directive 2015/412 which will enable, though not compel, Ireland to opt out of cultivation of GMO crops approved for cultivation elsewhere in the EU. There are no approved GM crops cultivated in Ireland currently.

Notwithstanding the transposition of this Directive, the Government keeps Ireland's GMO cultivation policy under ongoing review, particularly in light of scientific developments in this rapidly evolving sector.

All applications for authorisation by the EU to place feed products consisting of, or containing, genetically modified ingredients on the markets of Member States are considered individually. Irish Government policy is positive but precautionary on biotechnology and a common voting position is adopted by Ireland for food and feed on the basis of a favourable opinion from European Food Safety Authority and the Food Safety Authority of Ireland.

### **Common Agricultural Policy Negotiations**

65. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the 5% cut in the CAP budget was discussed at the October 2019 agri-fish Council meeting; and if he made a contribution to the debate to outline his position. [43554/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** At the October 2019 Agri-Fish Council, the Finnish Presidency presented a 'state-of-play' paper on the CAP post-2020 reform package, where my Ministerial colleagues and I exchanged views on the key issues that are deemed to require further consideration.

While funding for the CAP is outside the remit of Agriculture Ministers, I have been working with my European counterparts to raise awareness and build consensus around maintaining a strong CAP budget post 2020. In May 2018, I co-signed a Joint Memorandum in Madrid, calling for the CAP budget to be retained at current levels for the EU 27 post-2020. This memorandum was widely supported by 20 other EU Agriculture Ministers. At the October 2019 Agri-Fish Council, I joined with 16 EU Agriculture Ministers to reiterate the call for the CAP budget to be maintained post-2020, to meet the new challenges faced by European agriculture

and forestry.

I have always stated that the proposed cut is unacceptable for Ireland. I have used every opportunity in the course of discussions at EU Agriculture Council meetings to call for the CAP budget to be maintained.

Negotiations on the MFF proposals are running in parallel to the CAP post-2020 negotiations, and agreement requires unanimity at the EU Council. There are diverging views amongst Member States on the appropriate level for the budget, and further discussion is required before agreement can be achieved. The impact of Brexit further compounds the budgetary issue, with some €12 billion per annum in UK net contributions being removed from the EU budget post-2020.

I will continue to work with my European counterparts with a view to maintaining the CAP budget as the negotiations for the CAP post-2020 and its budgetary allocations progress.

### **Agrifood Sector**

66. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he remains satisfied that the agrifood sector will continue in line with expectations while at the same time meeting carbon reduction targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49102/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Food Wise 2025 is the current ten-year strategy for the agri-food sector and it underlines the sector's unique and special position within the Irish economy and illustrates the potential which exists for the sector to develop further. Food Wise contains a vision of thriving primary producers and agri-food businesses at the heart of vibrant communities across the country and was built upon five cross-cutting themes – environmental sustainability, market development, competitiveness, innovation and human capital.

The Food Wise 2025 strategy aims to grow the Irish agri-food sector in an economic, environmental and socially sustainable manner, building on our strengths in the production of safe, healthy and nutritious food. In terms of carbon footprint per unit of output, Ireland is already one of the EU's most efficient producers of milk and beef. Under Food Wise we are implementing measures to drive down the carbon intensity of our food production even further, resulting in both economic returns and environmental sustainability.

Preparations are now underway for the next ten-year strategy for the agri-food sector to 2030. A public consultation was launched in July to ascertain the views of all stakeholders on the direction of the sector to 2030 and a national stakeholder consultation event was held on 16 October in the Aviva Stadium.

I will shortly convene a Committee made up of representatives from across the sector. The Committee will be tasked with preparing a strategy for the development of the agri-food sector for the period to 2030. The strategy will outline the vision and key objectives, with associated actions, required to ensure the economic, environmental and social sustainability of the agri-food sector in the decade ahead. A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) will also be conducted in parallel with the work of the Committee. This is to ensure that environmental considerations are fully integrated into the preparation of the strategy and is a legal requirement. It is anticipated that the overall process will be complete, and the new strategy launched in mid-2020.

The All-of-Government Plan to tackle climate breakdown identifies a series of actions for the agriculture, forestry and land-use sector that ensure a fair contribution from agriculture and land use to our transition to a low carbon economy and society. This reflects our policy approach to achieving carbon neutrality without comprising sustainable food production and sets a target to reduce emissions from agriculture by between 10 - 15% by 2030, which is extremely ambitious.

The Teagasc Marginal Abatement Cost Curve (MACC) provides a suite of actions that provide opportunities for emissions reductions including both efficiency measures, such as the Dairy EBI programme, and technical measures such as changes in fertiliser type or low emissions slurry spreading. This is in addition to a series of forestry and bioeconomy measures.

Reducing emissions between now and 2030 will require us to manage the emissions profile from the sector between now and then through mobilisation of as many of these actions as possible, as early as possible, with high rates of adoption across our 139,000 farms.

### **Common Agricultural Policy Negotiations**

67. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of discussions at the most recent Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting regarding CAP proposals post-2020 including transitional provisions; if existing schemes will be rolled over in pillars 1 and 2; his views on the new green architecture proposed and targets for environmental measures set out by the Finnish Presidency for the next CAP. [49061/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** At the Agri-Fish Council on 18 November 2019, the Commission presented two proposals for CAP transitional rules. Such transitional measures are normal practice between consecutive programming periods, to provide legal and financial certainty where a gap arises due to any delays in finalising a new EU Budget and CAP regulations.

The recent Council accepted the need for such proposals and broadly welcomed them. However, discussions are ongoing, with a number of key issues yet to be agreed.

The Commission proposals provide the option to extend the current Rural Development Programme, in certain circumstances. It aims at providing certainty on the process around granting of support for the year 2021. Agreement on this regulation is not expected to be achieved until Summer 2020, subject to agreement on the EU budget. Discussions on this latter regulation will continue over the coming months.

The transitional regulations are complex and a number of issues need to be considered in more detail, in relation to the Rural Development Programme and how the transitional regulation will work in practice. I am continuing to work with the Commission and my European Ministerial colleagues to reach agreement on these important legislative proposals and provide certainty to Irish farmers at the earliest possible date.

I expect that the transitional regulations will, at a minimum, provide for the extension of the existing RDP into 2021 and there should be no interruption in direct payments. It may also be possible to provide for new Agri Environment, climate, organic farming or animal welfare schemes, for a maximum of three years. The precise arrangements will be clarified when agreement is reached on the regulations.

In the meantime the N+3 rule will continue to apply, so that scheme commitments entered into by farmers prior to the end of 2020 will continue to be honoured after that date.

Also at Council, my European Ministerial colleagues and I also had the opportunity to discuss the Finnish Presidency's proposal to set a single common percentage, or fixed amount, for environmental and climate purposes across the whole CAP Strategic Plan, as opposed to defined percentages for particular pillars.

I am a strong proponent of the higher level of environmental ambition in the next CAP and I am ready to explore all possible options. However, I believe the details of the Finnish Presidency's proposal will have to be developed further before we reach any definitive conclusions. It is essential that the proposed new environmental conditionality is implemented effectively, with common standards that are relevant and effective.

I took the opportunity to again reiterate that it is vitally important that the overall level of the budget acknowledges the public goods being delivered by farmers. Negotiations for the CAP post 2020 are still ongoing and I will continue to seek to secure the best possible outcome for the Irish agri-food sector.

## **Beef Industry**

68. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the beef market task force will meet; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49064/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As the Deputy will be aware, the inaugural Beef Taskforce meeting scheduled for 14th October was prevented from proceeding. However, since then the independent chair and my Department continue to engage proactively with Taskforce members with a view to both progressing the implementation of the provisions of the agreement.

My Department and its agencies continue to progress the commitments which they signed up to under the Agreement. The full text of the Agreement between beef sector stakeholders, along with an update on the progress made on the action points to date, is available on my Department's website: <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmingsectors/beef/beeftaskforce/>

An immediate increase in a range of bonuses was announced as part of the 15 September Agreement. It has been confirmed to my Department that this bonus system is now in place.

Initiatives in the Agreement aimed at improving information along the supply chain included the commissioning of the following reports: an independent review of market and customer requirements; an independent examination of the price composition of the total value of the animal along the supply chain; and a summary of competition law issues as relevant to the Irish beef sector. My Department has issued the Request for Tender for these reports, with a deadline for receipt of Tender Responses of 12 noon on Thursday 5th December. This will enable award of the tender before the end of 2019.

In relation to market transparency initiatives, my Department:

- has published an expert report on mechanical carcass classification review;
- has introduced an appeals system for manual grading; and
- has initiated a consultation process on the transposition of the Unfair Trading Practices (UTP) Directive, with a deadline for submission of 13 December.

Bord Bia has developed a beef market price index model based on 3 components: cattle price index, beef market price index (retail and wholesale) and an offal price indicator. This

is now available on the Bord Bia website: <https://www.bordbia.ie/farmers-growers/farmers/prices-markets/beef-market-tracking/>

Teagasc is significantly advanced in the first stage of the scientific review of the Quality Payment Grid(QPS).

My Department is also proactively engaging with several potential beef Producer Organisations, which have the potential to strengthen the bargaining power of beef farmers in the supply chain. Two beef producer organisations have been formally recognised by my Department in recent months.

I established the Beef Market Taskforce to provide the leadership to develop a sustainable pathway for the future of the beef sector in terms of economic, environmental and social sustainability. As I have previously stated, it is in the interests of everyone involved in the beef sector that the work of the Taskforce goes ahead. I hope that all parties will agree to come together around the table as soon as possible in order to progress this important work.

### **Afforestation Programme**

69. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans to expand the national afforestation programme. [49106/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department is fully committed to supporting the expansion of the national forest estate and will continue to fund new planting through generous grant and premiums under the forestry programme, which has a very substantial allocation of €103m for 2020. This reflects our commitment towards working to the planting target of 8,000 hectares contained in the Climate Action Plan. I am more than aware that this level of planting will be challenging and that it will require shared action from the private sector, public bodies and the community at large, including business.

We are doing all that we can to expedite planning appeals. A report which we commissioned from an external consultant, reviewing our approval process, is due this week and will, I expect, contain recommendations which will make the system more efficient and effective. We will also be looking at other issues which affect landowner participation in the scheme and are currently reviewing the COFORD Forestry Land Availability Implementation Report in this regard.

It is likely that planting private land alone will not be sufficient to deliver 8,000 hectares, which is why Coillte's proposed planting of 1,500 hectares of former Bord na Mona land over the next three years is very welcome. I am hopeful that other public bodies will follow suit and will be looking for support from my colleagues in government, local authorities and others to help us achieve our national target.

Businesses too can play their part. A new woodland Environmental Fund provides an opportunity for businesses to contribute to the planting of native woodland. I am pleased to say that An Post has already partnered with us under the Fund and other businesses are about to do so.

We are also funding forestry promotional initiatives in the amount of nearly €1 million and Teagasc is also actively promoting forestry through a substantial programme of education and forestry events.

I am confident that this suite of actions will lead to the desired increase in planting levels

necessary to meet our target.

## EU Investigations

70. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the investigation by the European Commission into the lack of control in certain areas carried out by the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority; the background to the investigation; the terms of reference for same; the timeline for the completion of the investigation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49070/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Further to a 2018 audit carried out by the Commission in Killybegs in 2018 which identified “severe and significant weaknesses in the Irish control system”, Ireland received a formal decision of the Commission’s intention to conduct an administrative inquiry to evaluate Ireland’s capacity to apply the rules of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Principally, the Commission identified shortcomings related to the effective control of pelagic fisheries, issues related to underreporting of catches of these species, the inadequate and ineffective sanctioning system for offences committed by operators and the lack of control and enforcement of bluefin tuna catches by recreational vessels.

The formal administrative inquiry requires Ireland to provide information on these specific findings to enable the Commission to further evaluate Ireland’s capacity to apply the rules of the CFP and to assess the potential consequences of any failure to do so. The Commission will analyse the information provided by Ireland and identify any further steps or actions necessary. The Commission has set the 6th December as the deadline for the submission of the requested information.

As Minister, I have no role in the operational control matters which formed the Audit findings. The monitoring and control of fishing vessels within Ireland’s Exclusive Fisheries Zone are matters for the Irish control authorities. Under the Sea Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act, 2006, all operational issues of this nature concerning sea fisheries control are, as a matter of law, exclusively for the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority and the Naval Service. The issues arising in the administrative inquiry are operational matters for SFPA and, as Minister, I am precluded from getting involved in these matters.

In addition to this, Article 4 of Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2001 regarding public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents clearly prevents the release of documents relating to the administrative inquiry being made public.

## Agriculture Scheme Data

71. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of approved applicants to each 2019 area-based scheme in pillars 1 and 2; the number of applicants who were selected for an inspection; the number who have had their inspection and are awaiting their advance payment; the number who have had their inspection and received their advance payment; the number who have not had their inspection to date and are awaiting payment by county in tabular form. [49057/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** EU regulations governing the administration of the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), the Areas of Natural

Constraints Scheme (ANC) and other area-based schemes require that full and comprehensive administrative checks, including Ground or Remote Sensing (Satellite) inspections where applicable, are fully completed to ensure eligibility with the various schemes requirements before any payments issue. There are certain minimum numbers of inspections that must take place annually under the various schemes. The regulations further prescribe that the inspection process must be fully completed before any payments can issue.

It is important to note that, in many cases, the existence of an inspection will not necessarily be delaying payment. In relation to the ANC Scheme, this scheme is subject to a range of eligibility and compliance criteria such as the requirement to meet a minimum stocking density in addition to maintaining minimum livestock units calculated over the twelve months of the scheme year. At this stage, a number of farmers are not eligible to receive payment as they have not met scheme-specific criteria. When an applicant meets these criteria, they will become eligible for payment, which will be processed promptly. Factors that may impact on payment issuing under BPS include, for example, applications to transfer entitlements, request for change in ownership etc., and officials in my Department are actively processing such cases.

Some 8,000 applicants have been selected for a Land Eligibility inspection in respect of the various 2019 area-based schemes. Where an application is selected for inspection under any of the area-based schemes, the outcome of that inspection applies to all schemes for which the applicant has applied.

The following table details the position on Ground and Remote Sensing inspections, as of 25 November, in relation to the BPS/Greening Payment and the ANC/Islands Schemes. I am providing this data at national level as the annual inspection programmes, including the risk analysis selection process, operates on a national basis. Therefore, any comparison on a county basis is meaningless.

Scheme	Number of Eligible Applicants	Number of Eligible Applicants Subject to Inspection	Number of Inspection Cases Fully Complete and Advanced to Payment Stage	Number of Inspection Cases Fully Complete and Paid	Number of Inspection Cases Fully Complete and Not Yet Paid	Number of Inspection cases to be Finalised
BPS/Greening	121,978	7,747	6,656	6,476	180	1,091
ANC/Islands	103,822	6,859	5,950	5,074	876	909

In situations where the inspection is finalised and an applicant is not yet paid, these relate mainly to cases where the scheme eligibility criteria have not yet been met, as I outlined earlier, or they have been finalised since the last run of scheme payments and will be included in the scheme payments commencing next week.

Regarding cases yet to be finalised, these fall into a number of categories, namely, applicants have been notified of the inspection outcome where an area over-declaration has been identified and a response is awaited; applicants have chosen to submit comments on notified inspection outcomes - these are currently being examined and are subject to final processing. The inspection results for the balance of cases are currently being finalised and will then be advanced through the final stages of processing promptly.

I can assure the Deputy that my Department continues to finalise cases including, Ground and Remote Sensing cases on a daily basis to ensure that BPS payments are issued as quickly

as possible.

Payments under the Protein Aid Scheme, Young Farmers Scheme and the Beef Data and Genomics Programmes are due to commence in early December, therefore detailed data in relation to these schemes is not yet available.

Advance payments under the Organic Farming Scheme are due to commence this week in respect of cases where all administration checks and validations have been completed. Detailed data is not yet available for these payments.

There are a total of 328 approved applicants in the Burren Programme. 20 applicants have been selected for inspection, of which 13 have received their advance payment. The remaining 7 cases are subject to final processing and the advance payment will issue as soon as possible on completion of this process.

### **Fish Quotas**

72. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which he plans to integrate the protection of island fisheries in quota allocation under the Common Fisheries Policy as recognised by the EU Commission as a distinct sector but not here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49082/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I wish to reassure the House that I recognise the value and importance of maintaining vibrant coastal and island communities. My Department and I have been creating and supporting policies to support inshore fishers all around the coast including islands. The majority of the fishing vessels based on islands are smaller vessels. Inshore fishing boats currently make up more than 80% of the fishing fleet and support an estimated 2,500 to 3,000 jobs. This economic activity is vitally important to the coastal communities around Ireland, including the island communities from which these boats operate. The national and regional forums are supporting initiatives that seek to protect the collective interests of the inshore sector in Ireland including on our islands. The NIFF has been effective in its participation on the Quota Management Advisory Committee, advocating on behalf of all small-scale fishers to influence how Ireland's uptake of quota is achieved.

In relation to quotas for fish stocks, these are available to small scale coastal fishermen who are licensed to fish for quota stocks including whitefish and pelagic stocks. Catch limits are set for whitefish stocks primarily based on the length of a fishing vessel. On this basis, all vessels under 55 feet in length receive the same catch limit. The important pelagic stocks of mackerel and herring already have allocations made available that supports inshore vessels.

In Ireland, quota is a public resource and this policy ensures that quotas do not become a saleable commodity that is bought up by large companies to the detriment of small scales operators, as has happened in other Member States. The result of this long-standing policy is that the Irish fishing fleet involves a balanced spread of sizes and types of fishing vessels which have retained a strong economic link with our coastal communities. This in turn delivers economic activity, including vital employment, in these communities where there are limited alternative economic activities.

On 21 December 2018, following a full public consultation process, I announced that vessels over 18m length overall will be excluded from trawling in inshore waters inside the six nautical mile zone and the baselines from 1 January 2020, with a phased reduction of the sprat fishery until 2022. I am mindful of the opportunity these measures will provide for further sus-

tainable development of the small scale inshore sector to fish within this area and with lower environmental impacts.

The proportion of landings being foregone by larger vessels will provide opportunities to smaller inshore and island fishermen which would represent a potential increase of 62% in the value of their landings. Additionally, the increase in availability of sprat and herring (when stocks recover) to smaller vessels will represent a diversification opportunity as these species are found in bays and coastal areas during the winter.

I am very conscious of the exclusive reliance of small scale and island fishermen on inshore waters and the benefits this change will bring for those fishermen. I firmly believe that this will, in the medium term, provide ecosystem and nursery stock benefits for all fishermen.

## **Beef Industry**

73. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the measures he has implemented following the Irish beef sector agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49065/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As the Deputy will be aware, the inaugural Beef Taskforce meeting scheduled for 14th October was prevented from proceeding. However, since then the independent chair and my Department continue to engage proactively with Taskforce members with a view to both progressing the implementation of the provisions of the agreement.

My Department and its agencies continue to progress the commitments which they signed up to under the Agreement. The full text of the Agreement between beef sector stakeholders, along with an update on the progress made on the action points to date, is available on my Department's website: <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmingsectors/beef/beeftaskforce/>

An immediate increase in a range of bonuses was announced as part of the 15 September Agreement. It has been confirmed to my Department that this bonus system is now in place.

Initiatives in the Agreement aimed at improving information along the supply chain included the commissioning of the following reports: an independent review of market and customer requirements; an independent examination of the price composition of the total value of the animal along the supply chain; and a summary of competition law issues as relevant to the Irish beef sector. My Department has issued the Request for Tender for these reports, with a deadline for receipt of Tender Responses of 12 noon on Thursday 5th December. This will enable award of the tender before the end of 2019.

In relation to market transparency initiatives, my Department:

- has published an expert report on mechanical carcass classification review;
- has introduced an appeals system for manual grading; and
- has initiated a consultation process on the transposition of the Unfair Trading Practices (UTP) Directive, with a deadline for submission of 13 December.

Bord Bia has developed a beef market price index model based on 3 components: cattle price index, beef market price index (retail and wholesale) and an offal price indicator. This is now available on the Bord Bia website: <https://www.bordbia.ie/farmers-growers/farmers/prices-markets/beef-market-tracking/>

Teagasc is significantly advanced in the first stage of the scientific review of the Quality Payment Grid(QPS).

My Department is also proactively engaging with several potential beef Producer Organisations, which have the potential to strengthen the bargaining power of beef farmers in the supply chain. Two beef producer organisations have been formally recognised by my Department in recent months.

I established the Beef Market Taskforce to provide the leadership to develop a sustainable pathway for the future of the beef sector in terms of economic, environmental and social sustainability. As I have previously stated, it is in the interests of everyone involved in the beef sector that the work of the Taskforce goes ahead. I hope that all parties will agree to come together around the table as soon as possible in order to progress this important work.

## Beef Industry

74. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the first meeting of the beef market task force will take place; the agreed timeline for action; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49059/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As the Deputy will be aware, the inaugural Beef Taskforce meeting scheduled for 14th October was prevented from proceeding. However, since then the independent chair and my Department continue to engage proactively with Taskforce members with a view to both progressing the implementation of the provisions of the agreement.

My Department and its agencies continue to progress the commitments which they signed up to under the Agreement. The full text of the Agreement between beef sector stakeholders, along with an update on the progress made on the action points to date, is available on my Department's website: <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmingsectors/beef/beeftaskforce/>

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### **Beef Exports**

75. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the expected tonnage of beef exports to China in the next 12 months in view of the swine influenza epidemic there; the measures Bord Bia is taking to maximise the volume of beef exports to China in view of the circumstances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49127/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Ireland gained access to the Chinese beef market in April 2018 when three beef plants were approved to export to China. Eighteen months later, 21 beef plants are now approved. The latest CSO trade data for the first nine months of 2019 shows that Ireland exported over 5,000 tonnes of beef to China, some four times the entire volume exported in 2018. This represents a very encouraging start to our beef trade.

The impact of African Swine Fever (ASF) has created a significant protein deficit in China, which has increased demand and prices for all meats in that market in the short term.

However, my main focus for Irish beef in China is on securing a high-value position for Irish beef that can be maintained in the longer term. Bord Bia's strategy is to differentiate Irish beef by growing recognition of, and preference for, grass-based, Quality Assured Irish beef in China. These brand building efforts are supported by online and offline promotions targeting trade, chefs and consumers. Equally important is a focus on building durable relationships and developing opportunities for a diverse range of beef cuts in foodservice, retail and e-commerce channels at regional level in China.

The enthusiasm and interest of Chinese consumers, food companies, leading chefs and food 'key opinion leaders' in the taste and quality of Irish beef was very evident during my recent trade visit to Shanghai and Beijing.

My Department's role is to open, enhance and maintain meat markets for industry. It is up to industry - with the support of my Department and Bord Bia - to exploit the opportunities created. The actual level of exports to any particular market in any period will depend on a range of factors, such as global supply and demand dynamics, currency fluctuations, consumer purchasing power and tastes.

### **Beef Industry**

76. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the progress made to date with regard to the beef market task force. [49007/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As the Deputy will be aware, the inaugural Beef Taskforce meeting scheduled for 14th October was prevented from proceeding. However, since then the independent chair and my Department continue to engage proactively with Taskforce members with a view to both progressing the implementation of the provisions of the agreement.

My Department and its agencies continue to progress the commitments which they signed up to under the Agreement. The full text of the Agreement between beef sector stakeholders, along with an update on the progress made on the action points to date, is available on my Department's website: <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmingsectors/beef/beeftaskforce/>

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77. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on whether there is sufficient fodder available for winter 2019-20 in the event of a cold snap; if an analysis has been carried out on fodder stocks for same; if he will be making changes based on the 2018-19 fodder crisis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49009/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** In 2018, a late spring and prolonged period of dry weather during the summer resulted in a difficult grass growing season in that year with subsequent reduction in fodder conservation. For 2019, Teagasc data, using its grass growth monitoring service, 'PastureBase Ireland', has shown that grass growth throughout 2019 generally returned to normal levels. These favourable growing conditions allowed for ample quantities of fodder to be conserved. This is supported by the fact that fodder prices throughout 2019 were significantly depressed on 2018 prices, indicating adequate supplies.

Whilst it is not possible to predict the duration or severity of the coming winter and its resultant impact on fodder availability, I am satisfied that there are currently sufficient stocks of fodder available. I can assure the Deputy that I, together with my officials, will continue to engage with stakeholders and closely monitor the situation over the course of the next few months.

### **Alternative Farm Enterprises**

78. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the recommendation made by the Youth Assembly to invest in hemp farming and assist farmers in the transition towards more sustainable agricultural practices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49010/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I congratulate the participants who were involved in the recent Youth Assembly in the Dail and welcome their efforts in highlighting issues relating to Climate Change. One of their ten recommendations was the development of industrial hemp processing facilities in an effort to provide viable, sustainable and alternative land use for farmers as well as employment in rural Ireland.

As the Deputy may be aware, current legislation does not allow for the growing of hemp unless a specific licence has been granted by the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) which operates under the auspices of the Department of Health. In addition, the cultivation of hemp (*Cannabis* genus) is restricted to varieties having less than 0.2% content of the narcotic compound Delta-9 Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). Cannabis (which includes hemp) is listed in schedule 1 of the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2017, as amended which means it is subject to the strictest level of control.

Earlier this year, my Department concluded a broad consultation, which included relevant bodies/agencies, in an examination of growing hemp commercially. The consultation included the Departments of Health, Justice and Law Reform, the Health Products Regulatory Authority, Teagasc and the two representative bodies for Hemp.

A clear view arising from respondents in the consultation involved in regulation is that the domestic hemp industry should continue to be controlled and regulated by the Department of Health and that the current stringent controls in relation to growing hemp should continue. This strict regulation is in line with the situation in many other countries.

It is also clear from the consultation, and from meetings officials of my Department have had with industry representatives, that further in-depth research and financial analysis is required to be undertaken by the industry in order to determine if the establishment of process-

ing facilities in Ireland is commercially viable. Currently, there are no processing facilities in Ireland. While my Department remains available to assist the industry, the Deputy should bear in mind that any developments in this area must be industry-led.

### **Alternative Farm Enterprises**

79. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to establish a biomass supply chain for the support scheme for renewable heat; the implications of the recent decision by An Bord Pleanála in west County Offaly for the establishment of a domestic biomass supply chain here; the status of Bord na Móna bioenergy plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49067/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Through the All-of-Government Climate Action Plan, my Department is working closely with other government Departments to ensure Ireland's transition to a low carbon economy and society. While agriculture contributes to the increasing concentration of greenhouse gases, the sector also has the means to be part of the alleviation process and has a key role to play in transitioning to a competitive, low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050.

Ireland's long-term policy vision for the agriculture and land use sector is 'an approach to carbon neutrality which does not compromise the capacity for sustainable food production'.

While carbon neutrality is yet to be fully defined, our policy approach is based on three principles:

- Reducing agriculture emissions;
- Increasing carbon sequestration; and
- The displacement and substitution of fossil fuel and energy intensive materials.

Indigenous renewable energy plays a vital role in our domestic fuel mix and will become even more important in the context of reducing our reliance on imported fuels and in meeting our challenging renewable energy targets for 2020 and 2030 and decarbonising our energy systems by 2050.

Ireland has a 16% target for renewable energy by 2020 and the production of indigenous biomass has a crucial role to play in helping us meet this renewable energy target and my Department has a key role to play in the supply of biomass materials in this regard.

Through the forestry programme, my Department is committed to increasing the supply of biomass from Ireland's forests. In 2018, 40% of the wood fibre used in Ireland was used for energy generation, mainly within the forest products sector, up from 34% a couple of years ago. This represents over 1.5 million cubic metres of wood fibre and includes, roundwood, sawmill and residues such as bark, sawdust and woodchip. The new Support Scheme for Renewable Heat is creating additional demand for biomass particular since the second phase was launched during the summer which will provide operational support for biomass boilers.

According to the All Ireland Roundwood Forecast 2016 – 2035, output from Irish forests is expected to double over the coming decades to around 8 million cubic metres. Most of this increased production will come from private forest owners. In fact, during 2018 total timber production from private forest owners exceeded 1 million cubic metres for the first time. In order to address the barriers that exist in mobilising this resource, my Department supports a

number of targeted measures including the construction of forest roads to provide access to the timber, knowledge transfer groups to assist forest owners in managing their forests and grants for second thinning of broadleaves which provides an important source of local firewood.

The Department did previously operate a bioenergy scheme to facilitate the establishment of energy crops (including willow and miscanthus) for use in renewable energy production. However, due to a low uptake, the scheme was suspended from 2016 and there are currently no plans to re-introduce support. On-going support for the production of biomass will continue to be provided under the Forestry Programme 2014-2020 which funds private afforestation and includes a specific “forestry for fibre” scheme.

My Department continues to consider all opportunities for further developments in the area of biomass in the context of the next Forestry Programme and the next CAP Strategic programme, which is currently being developed.

The Deputy will appreciate that Bord na Móna is a commercial State company operating under the Turf Development Acts, 1946 to 1998, and, as such, operational matters are the responsibility of the Board and management of the Company. Therefore, neither I nor my colleague the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment does not have any statutory function in relation the operation of, or the sourcing of fuel for, electricity generation plants.

I understand from the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment that the decision of the ESB to withdraw the co-firing planning application for Lough Ree Power and to not submit a new co-firing planning application for West Offaly Power is unlikely to alter supply demand estimates for biomass with regard to wood energy to any great extent.

### **Taoiseach’s Meetings and Engagements**

80. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Taoiseach the rules under which he flew to Zagreb, Croatia, recently on a Government aircraft. [49194/19]

**The Taoiseach:** I visited Zagreb on 20-21 November. The programme for my visit included official meetings with President Grabar-Kitarovic, Prime Minister Plenkovic, and a reception hosted by our Ambassador, attended by representatives of the small and vibrant Irish community in Croatia.

Unfortunately, due to a technical issue that delayed my arrival in Zagreb, it was not possible for me to meet with President Grabar-Kitarovic at the scheduled time on this occasion. However, I look forward to meeting with her again on another occasion.

My meeting with Prime Minister Plenkovic was especially timely, as Croatia will assume the Presidency of the EU for the first time in January. During its term in office it will manage a number of files of particular importance for Ireland, including Brexit and the Union’s budget for the period 2021-2027, the Multiannual Financial Framework. Our discussions focussed on these issues and also on the future enlargement of the EU. Croatia as a country in the Western Balkans has important insights to offer on this matter, and it will host a Summit on the region during its Presidency.

As a fellow small Member State, with a similarly small administration, Ireland understands well the scale of the task involved in undertaking a Presidency, and I offered the Prime Minister my full support and cooperation.

Whilst in Zagreb I had the opportunity for an extensive range of valuable meetings and

discussions with other European leaders principally concerning the next steps on Brexit and the future relationship with the United Kingdom - President of the European Council Donald Tusk, the incoming President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, Michel Barnier, the European Union's Chief Negotiator for the United Kingdom Exiting the European Union, President Anastasiades of Cyprus, President Iohannis and Prime Minister Orban of Romania, Prime Minister Borissov of Bulgaria, Prime Minister Karins of Latvia, Chancellor Merkel of Germany, Prime Minister Mitsotakis of Greece, Prime Minister Solberg of Norway and incoming Chancellor Kurz of Austria.

I used the Ministerial Air Transport Service (MATS) to travel to Zagreb. The MATS provides the Government and the President with an independent, flexible and effective air transport service to assist in meeting national and international obligations.

### Departmental Staff Data

81. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach the number of agency staff hired and/or engaged by his Department in the past five years to date; and the cost per year of same. [49304/19]

**The Taoiseach:** My Department avails of a contract cleaning service as a temporary measure to ensure that service levels in my Department are maintained while a recruitment process for additional cleaning staff is undertaken. In this regard, a total of 3 contract cleaners have been engaged by my Department for varying temporary periods over the past 5 years. The costs per year are outlined in the table.

Year	Cost
2015	Nil
2016	Nil
2017	€24,000
2018	€10,900
2019 (to date)	€22,900

### Ministerial Travel

82. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the name of each person who flew on the Government aircraft to the EPP conference in Zagreb, Croatia. [49195/19]

83. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the cost of using the Government aircraft to travel to Zagreb to the EPP congress [49214/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 82 and 83 together.

The Ministerial Air Transport Service (MATS) provides the Government and the President with an independent, flexible and effective air transport service to assist in meeting national and international obligations.

Information relating to the Ministerial Air Transport Service (MATS) is published on my Department's website and is updated on a monthly basis. In advance of the next update, the MATS details sought by the Deputy are set out as follows.

*Questions - Written Answers*

Date	Ministerial Time on Board(Minutes)	Route	Department	Passengers
20/11/2019	595	Baldonnell - Zegreb - Baldonnell	Taoiseach	Taoiseach, Mo-SPlus 6

The costs associated with CASA Maritime Patrol Aircraft used in provision of Ministerial Air Transport Service are as follows:

Aircraft	Average Fixed Costs Per Hour€	Average Variable Costs Per Hour€	Average Total Costs Per Hour€
CASA CN235	1,290	1,860	3,150

### **Ministerial Travel**

84. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of times that he and his officials made use of Air Corps aircraft and helicopters in each of the years 2014 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the departure and arrival location for each trip; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49202/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The Ministerial Air Transport Service provides the Government and the President with an independent and flexible air transport service to assist in meeting national and international obligations.

Information in relation to Ministerial Air Transport is publically available via a link entitled “Routinely Published Information” on the Department of Defence website where it is updated on a monthly basis: [www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-defence/](http://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-defence/)

### **Defence Forces Remuneration**

85. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the status of the recommendation by a person (details supplied) to appoint an independent chairperson to the conciliation and arbitration scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49252/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The Conciliation and Arbitration (C&A) scheme for members of the Permanent Defence Force operates under agreement between the Minister for Finance, Minister for Defence, RACO and PDFORRA.

The recommendation to appoint an independent Chairperson of the Conciliation Council is just one of Mr Barry’s recommendations in his report of the review of the scheme.

All the parties to the Scheme are in the process of developing a revised scheme implementing the recommendations in the “Barry” report. When the parties reach agreement on the terms of the revised scheme, the appointment of an independent Chairperson will take place in tandem with the introduction of the operation of the revised scheme.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

86. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of agency staff hired and-or engaged by his Department in the past five years to date; the cost per year of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49294/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** It has not been possible in the time available to compile all of the necessary information requested by the Deputy. The information will be forwarded to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### Defence Forces Reserve Strength

87. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the number of additional recruits the Reserve Defence Forces has taken on to date in 2019 with regard to each service; the gender breakdown of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49332/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** I am advised by the military authorities that, as of 31 October 2019, 102 new members have been inducted into the Army Reserve and Naval Service Reserve, as follows:

-	Total number inducted	Number of females inducted
Army Reserve (AR)	85	8
Naval Service Reserve (NSR)	17	2

The Government remains committed to on-going recruitment to the Arm Reserve and to the Naval Service Reserve. A recent open competition for recruitment to both the AR and NSR closed on 20 October 2019 and it is anticipated that further recruitment will arise from this.

### Civil Defence Data

88. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the budget allocation to the Civil Defence in each of the years 2017 to 2020, in tabular form. [49378/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The budget allocation for Civil Defence in each of the years 2017 to 2020 is outlined in the following table.

Year	Budget Allocation
2017	€5.24 million
2018	€4.24 million
2019	€4.74 million
2020	€5.24 million

The allocations for 2019 and 2020 include additional funding from Dormant Accounts towards the upgrade of Civil Defence vehicles, as follows: 2019 - €0.5 million; 2020 - €1.0 million.

### Departmental Staff Data

89. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the number of agency staff hired and-or engaged by his Department in the past five years to date; the cost per year of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49298/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** No agency staff are employed at the Headquarters of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

As with the majority of foreign services, the diplomatic Missions of the Department are staffed by a mix of posted officers recruited at Headquarters and locally-engaged staff. As posted officers rotate to and from HQ, locally-engaged staff are essential to the operation of diplomatic missions abroad as they provide continuity to the operation of the mission. They also possess skillsets which are essential to the effective running of missions abroad such as administrative and technical skills, a deep knowledge of the local environment and culture and fluency in local languages.

Employment agency staff are employed in a small number of missions where the necessity arises. Such Missions include new Missions, those with particular complexities in the local labour market or those where changes in the workload necessitate time for an assessment of the number and type of roles or skills needed. Open competitions for direct employment of locally engaged staff are generally held once there is clarity on operational requirements and the number and profile of the roles required.

Set out in the table is the total number and cost of agency staff engaged by the Department since 2015. The cost includes salary, social, medical insurance and other benefits required under local labour law as well as agency fees.

Agency staff 2015 - 2019 (five years)

Year	Number	Cost €	Average costs
2015	15	308,148	25,430
2016	19.5	368,000	18,871
2017	20	411,000	20,550
2018	22	418,000	19,000
2019	38	624,000	16,421

### Passport Services

90. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if all passports and passport cards issued to Irish citizens born in Taiwan will have the description of country of birth as Taiwan as was previously the case; the reason for changing the description; if the practice of other EU states will be followed; if the use of Taiwan as the description will be resumed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49373/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Ireland, like all EU Member States and the EU itself, adheres to the One China policy and does not recognise Taiwan as a State. As such, for Irish citizens born in Taiwan, it is not possible to populate the country of birth information field on their Irish passport with wording other than that of “Taiwan, Province of China (TWN)”. This is the official designation used by the United Nations.

### Diplomatic Representation

91. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to open a new consulate in Liverpool; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49377/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Ireland will seek to maintain a strong and enduring relationship with our nearest neighbour, the United

Kingdom, following its departure from the European Union. This relationship, and our future engagement, will be underpinned by the Common Travel Area, and the Institutions and principles of the Good Friday Agreement.

As part of “Global Ireland - Ireland’s Global Footprint to 2025,” the Government has committed to opening an additional consulate in another location in Britain post-2019 to further strengthen regional engagement. This is a commitment which the Taoiseach reiterated in June of this year during his visit to Manchester for the British-Irish Council.

It is envisaged that the new consulate will cover the entire North of England, including major population centres such as Leeds, Sheffield, Liverpool, Manchester and Newcastle. This broadly matches the area known as the “Northern Powerhouse,” an area with a population of c. 15 million people. A decision on the optimum location for this new consulate will be taken in due course.

Additionally, it is worth noting that, since the UK referendum on EU membership in 2016, the Government has committed increased resources to our Embassy in London, already the largest bilateral Embassy in our network. These resources have come from both this Department and from several other Government Departments in order to ensure the Embassy’s optimal engagement across all relevant policy areas. It is envisaged that the Embassy in London will continue to expand in order to support the bilateral relationship and to promote and protect Irish interests across every sector in a post-Brexit context.

Ireland is also well represented across the devolved regions. In Scotland, the Irish Consulate in Edinburgh continues to be active in promoting and protecting Irish interests, driving a substantive programme of Scottish-Irish cooperation and exchanges. In addition, our footprint has also been re-established in Wales, where the Consulate in Cardiff re-opened in April of this year, with a political and economic focus.

From an FDI perspective, the UK is, and will continue to be, a very important source market for Ireland. It will continue to be the largest market for many of our exports, and the place in which many thousands of our diaspora continue to live, study, and work. It is a priority of this Government to ensure that these deep and positive relationships continue to be maintained and strengthened at every level in the coming years.

### **Foreign Birth Registration**

92. **Deputy Anne Rabbitte** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade further to Parliamentary Question No. 101 of 5 November 2019, the reason for the delay in releasing the approved applications for foreign birth registration certificates for persons (details supplied). [49402/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Further to my reponse to Parliamentary Question No. 101 of 5 November 2019, I am advised that a member of the Foreign Births Registration Team has been in contact with the applicant directly and these applications have now been approved.

### **Fiscal Data**

93. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Finance the way in which the costs associated with pay restoration for section 39 workers in 2019 and 2020 were factored into the fiscal

space calculations for 2019 and 2020, respectively; the way in which the costs have been factored into future fiscal space projections, that is, if the estimated costs are included in the pre-committed amounts for public pay detailed in summer economic statements in 2019 and 2020 or if they are factored in elsewhere; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49278/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Non-acute and community organisations under Section 39 of the Health Act, 2004 are not part of the general government sector, i.e. they are not ‘on-balance sheet’.

Staff in these agencies are not public servants; instead, the Health Service Executive engages such agencies through service arrangements.

Accordingly, pay costs for these staff are not recorded in the general government compensation of employee data as presented in the budgetary tables.

### Departmental Staff Data

94. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance the number of agency staff hired and-or engaged by his Department in the past five years to date; the cost per year of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49297/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I wish to advise the Deputy that the Department of Finance did not engage any agency staff over the past five years.

### Revenue Commissioners Enforcement Activity

95. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a series of matters (details supplied). [49307/19]

96. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a series of matters (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49308/19]

97. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Finance if he will address a series of matters (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49309/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 95 to 97, inclusive, together.

I am advised by Revenue that the construction sector continues to feature prominently in its overall compliance intervention activities and a comprehensive programme of site visits has operated, across both publicly funded and private developments, for several years. A key focus of these visits is the identification and correction of misclassified employments. To give an overview of the scale of activity, the following table sets out the numbers of sites visited, persons interviewed and numbers that were newly registered for tax or whose status was reclassified from sub-contractor to employee for the years 2016 to 2018.

Year	Site Visits	Persons Interviewed	Reclassifications	New PAYER Registrations
2016	2,126	11,699	345	848
2017	1,816	10,083	484	723
2018	1,795	8,305	258	492

Regarding the Deputy's request for a breakdown of reclassifications between public and privately funded sites, I am advised by Revenue that while it operates its inspection programmes across all areas of construction, it does not capture information on the funding models or tenders involved as this is not relevant to the employment status or tax treatment of the workers operating on site. For this reason, it is not possible to provide the Deputy with the information requested.

Revenue has also confirmed that it does not capture information on the ratio of reclassified employees versus overall numbers of employees or in regard to sub-contractors versus employees because this data quickly fluctuates throughout the life-cycle of site projects.

I am further advised that it has not been Revenue's practice to develop estimates of PRSI foregone in these cases as the focus is on establishing the correct classification and tax and PRSI treatment for the individuals concerned. I can, however, confirm that during the three years 2016, 2017 and 2018, compliance interventions carried out in the construction sector generated a combined tax and PRSI yield of €54.7million, €60.2 million and €50.6 million respectively, representing a total yield of €165.5 million for those three years.

Finally, I am advised that site visits are generally conducted on an unannounced basis, particularly where Revenue believes there is a significant risk of employment misclassification.

### Tax Code

98. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Finance the estimated amount it would cost in a full year if the threshold for both group B and group C of capital acquisitions tax increased by 10%; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49376/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am advised by Revenue that information relating to the changes to the Capital Acquisitions Tax B and C thresholds is published on their Ready Reckoner. For convenience, the link to this is as follows: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/information-about-revenue/statistics/ready-reckoner/index.aspx>

Pages 17 and 18 shows the yield or cost of changes to the Capital Acquisitions Tax B and C thresholds. Where the exact changes sought by the Deputy are not provided, they can be estimated on a straight-line or pro-rata basis.

### Tax Code

99. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Finance the status of plans to change flat-rate expenses and the reclaiming of same; the way in which this will impact on teachers; if he will review the case of a person (details supplied) and address the concerns outlined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49406/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** Over the past 18 months, Revenue has been conducting a comprehensive review of the administratively based Flat Rate Expenses (FRE) regime. Revenue has advised me that the purpose of the FRE review, which involved engagement with relevant representative bodies, is to ensure that the expenses granted to each employment category remain justified and appropriate to modern day employments and work practices. Each category of FRE allowance is being examined separately in the light of the legislative requirements of section 114 TCA 1997, which provides expenses are tax deductible only if they are wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred by the employee in the perfor-

mance of the duties of his or her employment and are not reimbursed by the employer.

Revenue has also advised me that its FRE review is ongoing but is now nearing conclusion, with an expected completion date by end year.

As I informed the House during the Report Stage debate on the Finance Bill last week, while I am aware of the effect this will have on those who are impacted by the change, I also need to respect the independence of the Revenue Commissioners. They are, though, keenly aware of the issues and concerns of those that may be affected by the outcome of the review.

Having regard to the fact that we are coming closer to the date on which any changes on foot of the review are due to be implemented, I have, as I committed previously to do, written to Revenue seeking a factual update on the review. Once this process of engagement with Revenue has been completed, I will be in a position to comment further on the matter, and conscious of the timeline involved, I anticipate that I will be able to do so very shortly.

### **Public Sector Staff Career Breaks**

100. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his views on a scheme (details supplied ); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49160/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** As Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, I have responsibility for the non-pay terms and conditions for the Civil Service. Other Ministers are responsible for the non-pay terms and conditions in the wider public service.

A Special Civil Service Incentive Career Break Scheme was introduced in 2009. There are no current plans to reintroduce this scheme or something similar.

Staff can still apply for unpaid career breaks which allows us, as an employer, to retain staff in cases where they need some time away from work to focus on other opportunities including focusing on family.

The Civil Service is also a leader in the field of flexible working. We estimate that about 17% of our workforce are currently on flexible work arrangements that include work-sharing and shorter worker year.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

101. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of agency staff hired and-or engaged by the OPW in the past five years to date; the schedule of the professions and roles the OPW hired in and-or engaged from agencies; the cost per year of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49286/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** I am advised that some of the information sought by the Deputy is not readily available and is currently being collated. A detailed response will issue to the Deputy as soon as it is available.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

102. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the number of agency staff hired and-or engaged by his Department in the past five years to date; the cost per year of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49302/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** My Department has not engaged the services of agency staff in the last five years.

### Public Sector Pensions

103. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the timeline to reinstate the levels of payment of pensions to workers which were cut under the FEMPI legislation to pre-FEMPI levels; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49418/19]

**Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am taking it that that the Deputy is referring to the Public Service Pension Reduction (PSPR), a reduction applied to public service pensions above certain exemption thresholds, which was introduced on 1 January 2011 under the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (FEMPI) Act 2010.

A three-stage partial reversal of PSPR was provided for in the FEMPI Act 2015, with rate reductions (through revised PSPR tables) occurring on 1 January in each of the years 2016, 2017 and 2018.

The Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 provided for the substantial further lessening of the impact of PSPR by way of rate and/or threshold changes in each of the years 2019 and 2020. The significant further lessening of PSPR occurring under the 2017 Act means that:

- as of 1 January 2019 all pensions up to €39,000 per annum are exempt from PSPR, and
- from 1 January 2020, all pensions up to €54,000 per annum will be exempt from PSPR.

For more recent retirees (February 2012 - 1 April 2019), no pension with a value of up to €60,000 per annum has been subject to PSPR since 1 January 2019, and those who retired after 1 April 2019 are not subject to PSPR at all. This implies that only those pre-March 2012 pensions that are linked to salary rates of a minimum amount of €108,000 per annum, or €120,000 per annum for the February 2012-1 April 2019 retiree group, will bear any persisting PSPR impact from 1 January 2020 on. When fully in place from the beginning of 2020, the changes will mean that the vast majority of public service retirees - approximately 97% - will be entirely free from PSPR.

Section 27 of the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 Act provides that the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform will, no later than 31 December 2020, make an order which will specify a date for the full removal of PSPR from that residual group of PSPR-affected pensions. Accordingly, the date specified in the order will effectively be the date for the complete abolition of PSPR.

### Special Educational Needs Data

104. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of primary and secondary schools in County Wicklow that have autism units; the number of primary and secondary school students diagnosed with autism in County Wicklow; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [49162/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The provision of education for children with special needs, including those with Autism, is an ongoing priority for Government.

Currently, almost 20% of the total Education Vote or €1.9bn is invested in supporting children with special needs.

Since 2011 investment in Special Education supports has increased by 50%, which is significantly above the 7% increase in total student numbers over the same period.

As a result the numbers of special education teachers, special needs assistants and special class and school places are at unprecedented levels.

My Department does not hold information in relation to the number of children with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder in school.

The National Council for Special education (NCSE), an independent agency of my Department, is responsible for planning, coordinating and advising on education provision for children with special educational needs in consultation with the relevant education partners and the Health Service Executive (HSE).

The NCSE's policy advice on Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2016) noted a national ASD prevalence rate of 1.55% or 1 in every 65 students.

The majority of children with Autism attend mainstream class, where they may access additional supports if required.

But some students may find it difficult to manage full-time placement in mainstream and so placement in a Special Class or Special School setting may be deemed appropriate where placement in mainstream class is not in the best interests of the child.

The enrolment of a child to a school is a matter in the first instance for the parents/guardians of the child and the Board of Management of a school. My Department has no role either in making or deciding on enrolment applications to schools or keeping waiting lists. In these matters, schools are required to adhere to the requirements of relevant legislation and the policies of my department.

The NCSE has responsibility for coordinating and advising on the education provision for children nationwide and has well established structures in place for engaging with schools and parents.

Nationally, 167 new special classes opened this school year, which means there are 1,618 special classes in place, compared to 548 in 2011.

Of these 1,353 special classes cater for students diagnosed with ASD.

Provision in our 124 special schools has also increased from 6,848 placements in 2011 to 7,872 this year.

In Wicklow alone there are 62 special classes and 3 Special Schools providing specialist support to children with more complex special educational needs.

The NCSE has planned a further expansion of special class and school places in Wicklow for next year.

It is open to any school to make an application to the NCSE for the establishment of a specialised provision and where sanctioned, there is a range of supports including capital funding available to the school.

Normally, special class and school places are established with the full cooperation of the schools in areas where they are required. However there are some parts of the country where the Council has faced challenges in getting schools and their Patrons to voluntarily agree to provide special class or school places.

I know that this can cause much anguish for parents and families involved.

As Minister I have a power under Section 37A of the Education Act 1998 to direct a school to provide additional provision where all reasonable efforts have failed.

I would prefer to see schools volunteer to provide more places rather than places being secured on the back of an order or a direction from me. It is the right thing for the children in a community.

All schools have the contact details of their local SENO, while Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs and to identify appropriate educational placements, using the contact details available on the NCSE website [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

### **Departmental Funding**

105. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the initiatives or grants available for local organisations and groups to assist local schools in the promotion of sports and active lifestyle courses for students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49176/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** While my Department is active in the area of promotion of health and wellbeing in schools, it does not offer initiatives or grants to local organisations and groups to assist local schools in the promotion of sports and active lifestyles courses for students.

You may wish to address your query to the Department of Transport Tourism & Sport.

### **Teaching Qualifications**

106. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the acceptable requirements to receive approval for time served teaching outside the European Union in respect of teachers who have taught outside the European Union; and the reason time served teaching at overseas private primary schools is recognised and time served teaching at secondary schools is not. [49254/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The criteria for the award of incremental credit to recognised teachers was agreed under the auspices of the Teachers Conciliation Council (TCC). This Council is comprised of representatives of teachers, school management, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the Department of Education and Skills and is chaired by an official of the Workplace Relations Commission.

The criteria for the award of incremental credit is laid out in my Department's Circulars,

10/2001 for Primary teachers and 29/2007 & 29/2010 for Post-Primary teachers.

### **Schools Refurbishment**

107. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 164 of 12 November 2019, if a contractor has now been appointed; if the HSA has signed off on a schedule of works, method statement and timeline for the works to be completed at a school (details supplied). [49256/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I am pleased to inform the Deputy that approval has been granted to appoint a new specialist to enable the preparatory work necessary to proceed with the repair works. All the relevant stakeholders are working together to agree on a date for the works to resume. This can be expected to occur in a timely manner while remaining cognisant of the circumstances previously outlined to the Deputy.

### **Departmental Correspondence**

108. **Deputy James Lawless** asked the Minister for Education and Skills further to Parliamentary Question No. 153 of 19 November 2019, if a copy of the letter outlining points raised at the meeting including the importance of a balanced research system will be provided. [49271/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Deputy will appreciate that the letter comprises part of the ongoing consideration of and engagement on the draft strategy. On that basis while this process of deliberation on the draft strategy continues and pending the finalisation of the strategy and its approval by Government publication would not be appropriate.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

109. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of agency staff hired and-or engaged by his Department in the past five years to date; the cost per year of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49295/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My department does not employ agency staff. Where we have a requirement for temporary clerical support we have Temporary Clerical Officers assigned from the Public Appointments Service.

### **Departmental Funding**

110. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding a grant application by a school (details supplied); if there is a separate grant scheme for such works; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49312/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I can inform the Deputy that the school to which he refers has been advised of the position which is that the items in question are not covered under the Furniture and Equipment Grant Scheme. The school was further advised that the Minor Works Grant would normally be used to purchase such items.

## Teachers' Remuneration

111. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to reduce the pay gap between teachers recruited pre- and post-2011; the timeframe for achieving pay parity for teachers recruited pre- and post -2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49314/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The public service agreements have allowed a programme of pay restoration for public servants to start. The starting salary for a new entrant teacher in 2012 was €30,702. As a result of the programme of pay restoration, the starting salary of a teacher is now €36,953 and from 1 October 2020 onwards will be €37,692.

Section 11 of the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 provides that “the Minister [for Public Expenditure and Reform] shall, within three months of the passing of this Act, prepare and lay before the Oireachtas a report on the cost of and a plan in dealing with pay equalisation for new entrants to the public service.”

The report laid before the Oireachtas on foot of this provision by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform assesses the cost of a further change which would provide a two scale point adjustment to new entrants recruited since 2011. The total cost of such an adjustment across the public sector is of the order of €200 million, of which Education accounts for €83 million. The report also acknowledges that, during the financial crisis, there were policy changes which affected remuneration in different occupations across the public sector (including education).

The matter of new entrant pay is a cross sectoral issue, not just an issue for the education sector alone. The Government supports the gradual, negotiated repeal of the FEMPI legislation, having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants.

On 24 September 2018, an agreement was reached between the Government and the public services committee of ICTU in respect of new entrant pay.

This agreement will benefit 16,000 teachers and nearly 5,000 SNAs within the education sector. The deal provides for a series of incremental jumps for new entrants.

I am fully aware that the teacher unions have outstanding issues of concern following the September 2018 agreement. These outstanding matters will be given full consideration. This will happen either in the context of any pay review mechanism agreed by the parties to the Public Service Stability Agreement, or in the context of the next round of pay talks. The positions of each of the parties on these matters must be given due regard in endeavouring to reach a mutually agreed resolution.

The current series of restorative measures for new entrants have been achieved through continued engagement and collective bargaining between the Government and the public service unions and shows the benefits that such engagement can bring.

## Literacy Programmes

112. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department has forecast the funding amount, the numbers of beneficiaries and type and amount of provision to achieve the NSS targets in view of the declining number of beneficiaries of adult literacy provision in ETBs. [49316/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):**

My Department prioritises supporting literacy acquisition both in childhood and throughout adult life. Good literacy skills equip citizens to participate in education, in work and in society. Children in Ireland, on the whole, perform very well in international surveys of literacy. However, the situation for the adult population is somewhat less positive, but there has been improvement in this area. In 2014, 14.6% of the working-age population had an education attainment of less than lower secondary. By the end of 2018 this figure had decreased to 11.8%. The target for end 2020 in the National Skills Strategy is 7% and despite the steady improvement in the figures it is unlikely to be achieved.

Over €800m is invested annually in the further education and training (FET) sector, and literacy and numeracy is a key component of all FET programmes. Within the overall investment in FET, some €35 million is spent annually on dedicated adult literacy programmes. Dedicated adult literacy programmes are part time and mostly accredited at levels 1 to 3 of the National Framework of Qualifications. While growing participation in these programmes should enable pathways into the higher level accredited provision required to contribute the achievement of the National Skills Strategy target, it will not in itself deliver the required outcome. It should also be noted that there has been no decline in the numbers of beneficiaries of adult literacy provision. There has been an increase of over 4,000 beneficiaries taking part in adult literacy programmes, from 60,800 in 2018 to 65,000 in 2019.

The delivery and enhancement of adult literacy and numeracy provision is being driven through the implementation of the Further Education and Training (FET) Literacy and Numeracy Strategy which is contained in the FET Strategy 2014-19. My Department, along with SOLAS, the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and partner agencies are collaborating on the ongoing development and enhancement of the structures required to progress its implementation. The strategy sets out 12 inter-related elements which aim to promote, develop and encourage literacy and numeracy skills in the adult population.

As well as dedicated literacy programmes, there is also a focus on supporting integrated literacy and numeracy on all FET programmes. Transversal skills, such as literacy and numeracy, form part of the QQI award standards in the FET sector. As the intergenerational benefit of Family Learning offers significant impacts to both the adult learner and the child, Good Practice Guidelines Family Literacy in ETBs have been developed over the last year and will roll out in 2020.

Building on the substantial level of adult literacy and numeracy education already delivered in the FET sector, my Department has focused increasingly in recent years on the needs of vulnerable people in employment. Initiatives such as Skills to Advance and the EXPLORE programme offer targeted support for employees in lower skilled jobs who need to adapt to a changing work environment. These initiatives are also a significant part of the Department of Education and Skills' national efforts to implement the European Commission's Upskilling Pathways Recommendation: New Opportunities for Adults, which aims to help adults acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills and gain accreditation at levels that will contribute to delivering on the National Skills Strategy targets.

### **Departmental Funding**

113. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an application for funding by a school (details supplied) to undertake electrical upgrading works will be granted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49320/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Deputy may be aware of my announcement of, 25th November 2019, of a €30 million package for 405 schools around the country to carry out specialist improvement works under the Summer Works Scheme 2020 onwards (SWS).

In this regard, I am pleased to advise the Deputy that funding, for the school in question, has been approved for 'Life Safety Systems'.

A full list of the successful schools is available online at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)

### **School Accommodation Provision**

114. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans for the proposed new post-primary school at Enfield, County Kildare; the manner in which it is expected to interact with other schools within the catchment area; if Johnstownbridge and Kilshanroe, County Kildare, will be included in the catchment area; the extent to which patronage has been determined; if parents in Johnstownbridge or Kilshanroe have an entitlement to vote in the determination of patronage; when the school will be open for students; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49350/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, my Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and uses a Geographical Information System, using data from a range of sources, to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise. With this information, my Department carries out nationwide demographic exercises to determine where additional school accommodation is needed at primary and post-primary level.

The school planning areas are used in the demographic exercise as a basis for the assessment of areas of growth and to inform recommendations on the establishment of any new schools required in that school planning area. For school planning purposes Johnstown Bridge is located in the Longwood school planning area and Kilshanroe is located in the Edenderry school planning area.

As the Deputy will be aware, in April 2018, the Government announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next four years (2019 to 2022), including a new 500 pupil post-primary school for Enfield (Kilcock school planning area) to be established in 2020.

New schools established since 2011 to meet demographic demand are required, in the first instance, to prioritise pupil applications from within the designated school planning area(s) which the school was established to serve. This does not preclude schools from enrolling pupils from outside of the school planning area where they have sufficient places, rather it reflects the need to accommodate in the first instance the demographic for which the school was established.

A patronage process is run after it has been decided, based on demographic analysis, that a new school is required. This patronage process is open to all patron bodies and prospective patrons. Parental preferences for each patron, from parents of children who reside in the school planning areas concerned, together with the extent of diversity currently available in these areas, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process.

The Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) has been developed by my Department to provide objective information to parents and guardians which will allow them to make an informed choice in expressing a preference for their preferred model of patronage for their child's

education.

The patronage process for new schools is overseen by an external independent advisory group, the New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG). Following their consideration of my Department's assessment reports, the NSEG will submit a report with recommendations to me for consideration and final decision. The assessment reports and the NSEG recommendations for all such patronage processes are made available on my Department's website.

The Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) closed for parental preferences on the 4th October 2019 for the six post-primary schools to be established in 2020, including the school referred to by the Deputy. It is anticipated that the successful patrons will be announced in the coming weeks.

The school will open in September 2020 in suitable interim accommodation pending delivery of its permanent building.

### **School Accommodation**

115. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the full extent of upgrades to facilities at a school (details supplied); the stage of the process; the timescale for conclusion; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49351/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department is in receipt of an application for additional school accommodation from the school authority in question. The application is currently being assessed and the school will be informed of the decision shortly.

### **School Transport Appeals**

116. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a series of queries (details supplied) submitted by email in September 2019 will receive a response. [49372/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** School Transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

In the 2018/2019 school year over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, were transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres at a cost of over €200m in 2018.

The purpose of my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

The School Transport Appeals Board, which is independent of my Department, determines appeals against decisions made by, or on behalf of, the Department of Education and Skills regarding the provision of school transport services and/or grant-aid under the terms of the School Transport Schemes.

An appeal has been lodged with the School Transport Appeals Board in relation to the chil-

dren referred to by the Deputy. The Board will consider this appeal at its next meeting on 19th December 2019.

### **Money Laundering**

117. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the estimated amount criminally laundered here in each of the years 2011 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49287/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I have consulted with An Garda Síochána in relation to the matter raised by the Deputy.

I am informed that it is not possible to provide the information requested.

Detected incidents of money laundering are recorded in various ways by An Garda Síochána. I have been advised by the Garda authorities that to examine all detected incidents associated with money laundering, with view to compiling an estimated figure as requested by the Deputy, would be highly onerous and would represent an unjustifiable use of Garda time and resources. Given this, I am not in a position to provide the information requested by the Deputy.

### **Garda Transport Data**

118. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of Garda vehicles attached to each district in County Wicklow as of 20 November 2019; the year, make and model of the vehicles; the equivalent figures as of 1 January 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49173/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The resources provided by Government to An Garda Síochána have reached record levels, with an allocation for 2019 of €1.76 billion and this is due to increase further to an unprecedented €1.88 billion for 2020. The capital budget for An Garda Síochána has also been significantly increased - a total of €92 million was provided this year, representing a 50% increase on capital investment in 2018. And capital investment will increase further to €116.5 million in 2020.

I can confirm that an overall investment of €46 million has been agreed by Government between 2016 and 2021. €10 million was made available for the Garda fleet this year. A further €9million will be provided next year as part of an overall investment of €46 million in the Garda fleet between 2016 and 2021.

It is important to be clear that under Garda Síochána Act 2005 as amended, the Garda Commissioner has responsibility for management of An Garda Síochána. He is responsible for the allocation and efficient use of Garda resources, in light of operational demands. This includes responsibility for allocation of Garda vehicles. As Minister I have no direct role in these matters. I understand however that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review, to ensure their optimum use.

The Deputy will appreciate that the size of the Garda fleet can fluctuate somewhat, as vehicles are added to and removed from the fleet.

I am further informed that the fleet in the Wicklow Division on 1 January 2019 included 61 vehicles. On 22 November it was 60. A breakdown of these vehicles for the Wicklow Division, as conveyed to me by the Garda authorities, is set out in the following tables.

**Wicklow Division as of 1 January 2019**

District	Cars	Vans	Motorcycles	4X4	Other
Baltinglass	10	3	0	1	0
Bray	19	4	1	1	1
Wicklow	13	4	0	3	1
Total	42	11	1	5	2

**Wicklow Division as of 22 November 2019**

District	Cars	Vans	Motorcycles	4X4	Other
Baltinglass	10	3	0	1	0
Bray	19	4	1	1	0
Wicklow	12	4	0	4	1
Total	41	11	1	6	1

I am informed that the current tender for the purchase of Garda vehicles through the Office of Government Procurement is for Hyundai, BMW and Ford vehicles.

I understand that this year's funding is being used for the purchase and fit-out of over 300 vehicles, of which 289 vehicles have been allocated to date. I understand that orders have been placed for a further 59 vehicles which will be allocated before the end of this year or in Quarter 1 2020. As a result, the Garda authorities consider that it is likely that the Garda fleet will be slightly larger at the end of the year compared to the total number of vehicles at the beginning of the year.

Further, my intention is that a further €1 million funding for the fleet will be included in additional funding to be provided to the Garda Vote before the end of the year.

I am assured that the allocation of Garda vehicles is made on the basis of identified operational demands and that the allocation of Garda vehicles is monitored and reviewed on a continual basis.

Finally, the Deputy may be interested to know that the Garda authorities are developing a Fleet Strategy, which I expect to set out detail on matters including, for example, the optimum size and composition of the fleet. I expect that the new Governance function in my Department will engage with An Garda Síochána, in that regard, as the process continues.

**Refugee Status Applications**

119. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 140 of 13 November 2019, when a person (details supplied) will receive a decision on the person's refugee status application following the recommendation of IPAT in November 2018 that the person be declared a refugee; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49216/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will be aware, for reasons of maintaining full confidentiality, it is not my Department's practice to comment on whether an application for asylum or subsidiary protection has been made in the State.

An applicant for such protection status, or their legal representative, should contact either the International Protection Office (IPO) or the International Protection Appeals Tribunal

(IPAT) directly, as appropriate.

The IPO may be contacted: by email to [info@ipo.gov.ie](mailto:info@ipo.gov.ie); by telephone to the IPO Customer Service Centre at 01 6028008 or in writing to Customer Service Centre, International Protection Office, 79-83 Lower Mount Street, Dublin 2. The International Protection Appeals Tribunal may be contacted either: by email to [info@protectionappeals.ie](mailto:info@protectionappeals.ie); by telephone at 01-4748400 (or Lo-Call 1890 201 458), or in writing to Corporate Services Division, The International Protection Appeals Tribunal, 6-7 Hanover Street East, Dublin D02 W320.

An applicant for international protection is awarded international protection, whether refugee status or subsidiary protection status, upon a declaration of status being issued from my Department. This is done on foot of a grant recommendation from the International Protection Office (IPO) or a decision of the International Protection Appeals Tribunal (IPAT) to set aside a refusal recommendation of the IPO. My Department processes the recommendations received from the IPO and the decisions of the IPAT in chronological order based on the date the file is received in that Unit. Once the necessary due diligence has been carried out by officials in my Department, a declaration of status will issue as soon as possible.

The Ministerial Decisions Unit of my Department may be contacted by email - [mduinfo@justice.ie](mailto:mduinfo@justice.ie)

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to my Department by e-mail using the Oireachtas mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the parliamentary questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

### **Departmental Correspondence**

120. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if correspondence sent to him by this Deputy (details supplied) has been received; if so, when a response will issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49231/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I can confirm that the correspondence referred to by the Deputy was received in my Department on 17 October 2019.

As the correspondence in question relates to a legal action, I understand that the Office of the Chief State Solicitor will respond directly on the matter.

The Deputy will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on the matter.

### **Departmental Correspondence**

121. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a reply will issue to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49236/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I understand that the Deputy's question relates to correspondence received by my Department in October 2019.

I can confirm to the Deputy that a response will issue shortly in that regard.

### Departmental Staff Data

122. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of agency staff hired and-or engaged by his Department in the past five years to date; the cost per year of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49301/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** It will not be possible to provide the information requested by the Deputy within the time allowed. I will write to the Deputy when it has been collated.

### Departmental Staff Data

123. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of agency staff hired and-or engaged by her Department in the past five years to date; the cost per year of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49290/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** Staffing resources are an ongoing priority to ensure my Department's continued ability to facilitate the wide mission and volume of work in a range of challenging policy areas. This will continue with ongoing day-to-day review of the appropriate staffing mix across my Department in response to known and probable priority areas.

My Department liaises directly with the Public Appointments Service (PAS) and Top-Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) in relation to the filling of posts.

However, where there is a requirement for particular critical skills that are not available at a point in time, or when a particular service is required for a short period of time, my Department will use the services of an Employment Agency to acquire the required skills.

In the past 5 years, 2 of the Offices of my Department have required the need of legal support in terms of both legal researcher and legal secretarial services. Further details are set out in the following table.

Year	No. of staff	Cost
2015	1	€56,376
2016	1	€40,077
2017	0	Nil
2018	1	€2,990
2019 to date	2	€27,383

My Department, as part of the workforce planning process, is constantly reviewing the resource and skills demands across the Department and its Offices and the Human Resources Unit of my Department is currently exploring other mechanisms to meet the increasing demands for legal support.

### Departmental Agencies Staff Remuneration

124. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health the estimated cost in each remaining year to complete the pay restoration process for section 39 health and disability type organisations by pay costs and associated pension costs; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [49277/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

### **Medical Card Applications**

125. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health when a reassessment will be carried out on a medical card application for a person (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49161/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

126. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49170/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Home Help Service Data**

127. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in County Wicklow awaiting home help hours to be approved, allocated or increased; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49177/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Medical Card Drugs Availability**

128. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health if EpiPens are covered under the

medical card; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49178/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the pricing and reimbursement of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Mental Health Services Expenditure**

129. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Health if there was a funding underspend from 2019 in the mental health services for CHO areas 6 and 7; if so, the amount; the location in which this funding was provided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49179/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Long-Term Illness Scheme Coverage**

130. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 383 of 13 February 2018, his plans to include the purchase of EpiPens under the long-term illness scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49180/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Long Term Illness Scheme was established under Section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970 (as amended). The conditions covered by the LTI are: acute leukaemia; mental handicap; cerebral palsy; mental illness (in a person under 16); cystic fibrosis; multiple sclerosis; diabetes insipidus; muscular dystrophies; diabetes mellitus; parkinsonism; epilepsy; phenylketonuria; haemophilia; spina bifida; hydrocephalus; and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide.

Under the LTI Scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines, and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness, free of charge.

There are no plans to include adrenaline auto-injectors under the LTI Scheme as they are not indicated for the treatment of one of the above conditions.

I wish to advise the Deputy that there are no plans to extend the list of conditions covered by the LTI Scheme at this time. However, I wish to inform the Deputy that it is proposed that the LTI Scheme would be included as part of a review of the basis for existing hospital and medication charges, to be carried out under commitments given in the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy.

### **Home Help Service**

131. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health if home help cover for holidays is available in each county; and if not, the counties in which it is not available. [49181/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

## Hospital Services

132. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Minister for Health the commencement date for the consultation process for Portlaoise Hospital; and the timeframe for completion. [49182/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As I have outlined previously, no decision has been made yet on the draft Action Plan for Portlaoise Hospital. I committed to ensuring that local clinicians and the community would be consulted with before a decision is made. The appointment of an independent external facilitator for the consultation process is being progressed. The outcome of the consultation process will be a submission from my Department, setting out the key findings from the consultation process and recommended response to inform me in making a final decision on the draft Action Plan.

## Hospital Waiting Lists

133. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49184/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

## Pharmacy Services

134. **Deputy Jim O'Callaghan** asked the Minister for Health the reason for the significant cuts to pharmacy funding proposed from 1 January 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49185/19]

165. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Health if consideration will be given to the concerns of pharmacists as outlined in correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49333/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 134 and 165 together.

As the Minister for Health I recognise the significant role community pharmacists play in the delivery of patient care and the potential for this role to be developed further in the context of health service reform and modernisation. Community pharmacy is recognised as the most ac-

cessible element of our health service with an unequalled reach in terms of patient contact and access, regardless of their geographic location or status as either an independent retailer or as part of a larger chain of providers.

The regulations governing the current pharmacy fee structure were made under section 9 of the FEMPI Act 2009 and are set to expire at the end of 2019. Under the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017, these regulations must be replaced on 1 January 2020 to maintain a statutory basis for contractor payments and to prescribe the fees payable from that date. The fees to be set are determined by the Minister for Health, with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

In keeping with my obligations under Section 43 of the 2017 Act, Department of Health officials have begun a process of consultation with the IPU, as the representative body, prior to the introduction of new fee regulations. My officials have met with an IPU delegation on two occasions and a detailed submission was received from the IPU on 8 November.

That submission is currently being considered by my Department in the context of the statutory fee-setting process as referred to.

In May of this year I addressed the Irish Pharmaceutical Union at the National Pharmacy Conference and gave a commitment to move beyond the arrangements underpinned by the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2009 (FEMPI) with a view to optimising the role of pharmacists in the years ahead. It is my intention to open contract discussions in 2020 which will assist to deliver on the commitment given.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

135. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) will be called for an operation at St. James's Hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49192/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Occupational Therapy Waiting Lists**

136. **Deputy Ruth Coppinger** asked the Minister for Health if extra resources will be allocated to reduce the 12-month waiting time for assessment by an occupational therapist; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49232/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply.

### **Addiction Treatment Services**

137. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if a dedicated addiction service for persons under 18 years of age operates in County Louth; if so, the location from which it operates; if not, his plans to address same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49237/19]

141. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the number and location of HSE staff working in addiction services nationwide; the staff vacancies and location of each. [49241/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 137 and 141 together.

As there are service matters, they have been sent to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Drug and Alcohol Task Forces**

138. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health if there is a requirement for statutory partners to engage with regional drug and alcohol task forces. [49238/19]

139. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the statutory partners which participate on the north east drug task force. [49239/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 138 and 139 together.

Maintaining a partnership approach between statutory, community and voluntary bodies is a core value of the national drugs strategy, Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery – a health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017-2025.

Drug and alcohol task forces play a key role in assessing the extent and nature of the drug problem in local communities and in ensuring that a coordinated approach is taken across all sectors to address substance misuse based on the identified needs and priorities in their areas. Task forces are made up of community, voluntary and statutory representatives.

The following statutory partners are represented on the North Eastern Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force: An Garda Síochána, Customs and Excise, the Department of Social Protection, the Education and Training Board, the HSE, Louth Co Council and the Probation Service.

I am committed to implementing an integrated public health response to substance misuse, and to supporting individuals, families and communities who are struggling with addiction and need intervention and support. Task forces working in partnership with statutory, community and voluntary sectors are central to this response.

### **Drug and Alcohol Task Forces**

140. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health the level of funding allocated to the north east drug task force in each of the past five years. [49240/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** Drug and alcohol task forces play a key role in assessing the extent and nature of the drug problem in local communities and in ensuring that a coordinated approach is taken across all sectors to address substance misuse based on the identified needs and priorities in their areas.

The Department of Health provides €28million per annum to drug and alcohol task forces through various channels of funding, including the HSE. This funding supports over 280 community projects prioritised by Drug Task Forces in local areas and communities throughout the country.

The North Eastern Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force received almost €928k of this allocation in 2019. This amount has remained the same for the past five years. Task force funded community projects may also receive funding from other sources, including the HSE.

The Department of Health provided additional funding of €1m in 2019 to implement key actions in the national drugs strategy. From this funding, the Department provided the North Eastern Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force with an additional €20,000 to support its work, €10,000 of which is recurring on annual basis. This funding can be used to enhance services and meet operating costs.

The Department of Health is also providing an additional €190,000 over a three-year period to the task force to establish a new strategic health initiative; Young People's Substance Use Support Services in Cavan & Monaghan. This initiative will improve access to health services for young people whose lives are affected by problematic alcohol and substance use in the two counties.

The initiative reflects regional priorities agreed between the community health organisation and the task forces and ensure that resources are targeted at groups most in need. It will strengthen early harm reduction responses to current and emerging trends and improve access to services for people with complex needs.

I am committed to implementing an integrated public health response to substance misuse, and to supporting those people in our communities who are struggling with addiction and need intervention and support. The task force working in partnership with statutory, community and voluntary sectors is central to this response.

*Question No. 141 answered with Question No. 137.*

## **Disease Management**

142. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the way in which a person (details supplied) can access treatment for lyme disease when appropriate services are unavailable here; if the person can access the cross border directive to seek appropriate treatment abroad; the options available for persons who continue to suffer from the disease after accessing all treatments available here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49248/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Lyme disease (also known as Lyme borelliosis) is an infection caused by a spiral-shaped bacterium called *Borrelia burgdorferi*. Lyme borelliosis is diagnosed by medical history and a physical examination. The infection is confirmed by blood tests which look for antibodies to *Borrelia burgdorferi* produced by an infected

person's body in response to the infection. These normally take several weeks to develop and may not be present in the early stages of the disease.

Lyme disease can be very successfully treated using common antibiotics. These antibiotics are effective at clearing the rash and helping to prevent the development of complications. Antibiotics are generally given for up to three weeks. If complications develop, intravenous antibiotics may be considered. In Ireland, treatment by most clinicians is based on that laid out in evidence-based guidelines for the management of patients with Lyme disease published by the Infectious Diseases Society of America in 2006.

Testing and treatment for Lyme disease is available in most of the larger hospitals in Ireland, therefore, there is no necessity for Irish residents to travel to other EU Member States for diagnosis or treatment.

Patients can seek to access health care in another EU/EEA member state via two different schemes.

Where a service is provided in Ireland, but a patient wishes to access care in another EU/EEA Member State, this can be possible by seeking treatment under the Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare, otherwise known as the Cross Border Directive (CBD). The HSE operates the CBD in Ireland. Referral for care under the CBD may be made by a GP, a hospital consultant and certain other clinicians. In line with practice in other EU Member States, the HSE through the National Contact Point (NCP) provides information for patients on the CBD on its website which can be accessed at: [hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/schemes/cbd/](http://hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/schemes/cbd/) and also by phone at (056) 7784551.

The HSE advises where a patient is in any doubt as to the need to seek prior authorisation before availing of a consultation or treatment abroad to contact the NCP.

The HSE also operates the Treatment Abroad Scheme (TAS) for persons entitled to treatment in another EU/EEA Member State or Switzerland under EU Regulation (EC) No. 883/2004, as per the procedures set out in EU Regulations (EC) No. 987/2009. The TAS provides for the cost of approved treatments in another EU/EEA member state or Switzerland through the issue of form E112 (IE) where the treatment is:

- Among the benefits provided for by Irish legislation;
- Not available in Ireland; and
- Not available within the time normally necessary for obtaining it in Ireland, taking account of the patient's current state of health and the probable course of the disease.

GPs refer patients to consultants for acute care and it is the treating consultant who, having exhausted all treatment options including tertiary care within the country, refers the patient abroad under the terms of the TAS. The consultant must specify the specific treatment and in making the referral accepts clinical responsibility in relation to the physician and facility abroad where the patient will attend. Applications to the TAS are processed and a determination given in accordance with the statutory framework prior to a patient travelling to avail of treatment. The statutory framework stipulates the patient must be a public patient and is required to have followed public patient pathways. Information on the TAS can be accessed on the HSE website at: [hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/schemes/treatmentabroad/](http://hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/schemes/treatmentabroad/) and also by phoning (056) 7784551.

## **Medicinal Products Availability**

143. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the progress made to ensure the swift provision of new medicines to persons with multiple sclerosis. [49257/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess a drug's clinical and cost effectiveness as a health intervention.

As a country, we invest heavily in medicines, to the tune of almost €2 billion annually. In 2019 to date, the HSE has approved 36 new drugs and newly licensed indications for existing drugs for reimbursement in the public healthcare system. The approvals to date represent an additional investment by the HSE over five years of approximately €220m in providing access to new and innovative treatment for Irish patients. It is expected that over 3,000 patients will benefit from access to these new medicines over the next 5 years.

Notwithstanding the significant progress on drug costs achieved from price reductions under the pricing framework agreed with industry and commercial negotiations conducted by the HSE, the Health Service is still facing very significant challenges in relation to the affordability of medicines. The industry continues to develop very expensive products, particularly in the high-tech medicines area and the costs involved are a challenge for health systems even in countries with much greater resources than Ireland.

The HSE has received 2 applications for pricing and reimbursement of ocrelizumab (Ocrevus). Application 1 is for use of Ocrelizumab for the treatment of adult patients with relapsing forms of Multiple Sclerosis (RMS) with active disease defined by clinical or imaging features. Following a number of rounds of commercial negotiations, an agreement was reached in relation to the commercial terms which will apply to this indication. The HSE intends to progress ocrelizumab for the RMS indication, which has been approved for funding from October 2019, on a patient-specific basis for this indication.

Application 2 is for the use of ocrelizumab for the treatment of adult patients with early primary progressive multiple sclerosis (PPMS) in terms of disease duration and level of disability, and with imaging features characteristic of inflammatory activity. On 4 October 2018 the NCPE completed its assessment for this indication. They did not recommend that ocrelizumab be reimbursed for this indication.

The HSE and the manufacturer have had a number of rounds of commercial negotiations in relation to this indication. Commercial discussions have concluded and the medicine has been reviewed by the HSE Drugs Group. The HSE Senior Leadership Team have received the Drugs Group recommendation. The HSE's final decision on reimbursement will take into consideration the criteria contained in the 2013 Health Act.

The HSE has also received an application for reimbursement of Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol/Cannabidiol, THC/CBD (Sativex) which is indicated as treatment for symptom improvement in adult patients with moderate to severe spasticity due to multiple sclerosis who have not responded adequately to other anti-spasticity medication and who demonstrate clinically significant improvement in spasticity related symptoms during an initial trial of therapy.

The HSE commissioned a full HTA with respect to this indication in April 2018. On 12 August 2019, the NCPE received the applicant's submission and the HTA is currently underway.

The Government wants new and innovative medicines to be available to our citizens as quickly as possible but this can only be achieved if medicines are priced by the pharmaceutical industry in a viable and sustainable manner.

My Department and the HSE are working on making greater efficiencies in medicines usage through a range of initiatives both domestically and internationally to ensure the greatest possible access to new treatments for patients in Ireland.

The HSE's Medicines Management Programme (MMP), incorporating the Preferred Drugs initiative, is overseeing the implementation of a number of actions to bring about greater value for the taxpayer through cost-effective provision of medicines. These measures include the designation of preferred products with a focus on high-cost prescribing areas, in particular optimising the use of biosimilars.

I and officials have also been engaging over the past number of years with a number of voluntary EU forums. In June 2018, I signed the Beneluxa Initiative on Pharmaceutical Policy. This Agreement is in line with my objective to work with other European countries to identify workable solutions, in an increasingly challenging environment, to secure timely access for patients to new medicines in an affordable and sustainable way. In June 2019, Ireland became a Founding Member of the International Horizon Scanning Initiative which is being established as part of the work programme of Beneluxa.

### **First Aid Training**

144. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health if life saving or first aid courses are required to include instructions on the steps to be taken if a person is choking while alone; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49258/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC) is an independent statutory body with responsibility for standards of education in pre-hospital emergency care.

Accordingly, the Deputy's query has been referred to PHECC for direct response.

### **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Staff**

145. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 327 of 15 October 2019, if CHO 2 and CHO 8 do not have a consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist; if so, the length of time the positions have been vacant; the recruitment under way to address same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49260/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **First Aid Training**

146. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health his plans to introduce an awareness campaign and-or training scheme for the public in the use of emergency medicines such as EpiPens; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49262/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In 2015 the then Minister for Health introduced the ‘Emergency Medicines’ legislation. This allows an appropriately trained non-medical person or a pharmacist to supply and administer specified prescription-only medicines, without a prescription, to an individual for the purpose of saving life or reducing severe distress in emergency situations.

The medicines that are included in this initiative are:- adrenaline auto-injectors (epipens) (for the treatment of anaphylaxis), glyceryl trinitrate (for the treatment of unstable angina), salbutamol (for the treatment of asthma attacks), glucagon (for the treatment of diabetic hypoglycaemia), naloxone (for the treatment of opioid overdose) and medical gas mixture consisting of 50% nitrous oxide and 50% oxygen (for the management of severe pain when used by emergency rescue organisations e.g. mountain rescue teams).

These provisions are contained in S. I. No. 449 of 2015 which amended the Prescription Regulations to allow these prescription-only medicines to be administered by trained members of the public in emergency situations. In order for an organisation, which can include schools, workplaces and other public places, to avail of an emergency medicine without the need for a prescription, members of that organisation must complete an approved course of training regarding the administration of such medicines and the management of any adverse reaction. The Pre Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC) has established a framework for the education and training of persons to safely and competently administer this medicine to those urgently requiring care.

It is important to note that there is nothing to prevent a person with a diagnosis of anaphylaxis who has been prescribed an EpiPen from carrying their prescribed medication with them at all times, in fact this personal action is strongly recommended. This is particularly important for persons at risk of an acute medical emergency, such as an anaphylactic attack.

Furthermore, medicines legislation permits any person to administer any medicine to another person in accordance with the directions of a registered medical practitioner. Therefore, if a person has been prescribed a medicine, but is unable to administer it to themselves, such as in the case of an overdose, there is no legal impediment to another person administering that medicine to the patient. [Regulation 4A(1)(c) of the Medicinal Products (Prescription and Control of Supply) Regulations 2003, as amended] (S.I. No. 540 of 2003)].

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

147. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49263/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has

been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

148. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied) in University Hospital Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49264/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

149. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49265/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

150. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied) in the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital, Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49266/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

151. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49267/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

152. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49268/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Ser-

vice Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

153. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49269/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

154. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of a hospital appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49270/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed

national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Ministerial Meetings**

155. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 267 of 10 July 2019, if a date for a meeting as promised will be provided (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49273/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** A meeting with senior officials in my department was offered to the representative group in question and this was rejected. While I make every effort to meet with as many stakeholders as possible, it is not always possible to commit to every meeting request. It is normal and productive practice for my officials to meet with interest groups on my behalf and it is regrettable that the offer of a meeting was refused in this instance. I would suggest that the group would reconsider the offer of a meeting in order to give them an opportunity to raise their concerns at departmental level at the earliest time possible.

### **HSE Staff**

156. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 345 of 5 February 2019, 201 of 19 June 2019, 497 of 9 July 2019 and 344 of 24 September 2019, the position regarding the staff breastfeeding in the workplace policy for HSE staff; if the policy has been signed off on by the HSE leadership team; the reason for the time delay; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49276/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** As the question refers to service matters, it has been referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy

### **HSE Agency Staff Data**

157. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of agency staff hired and-or engaged by the HSE in the past five years to date; the cost per year of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49284/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy on this matter.

### **Traveller Community**

158. **Deputy Gino Kenny** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Labre Park Traveller halting site is one of the few Traveller communities that is not covered by a primary health care team (details supplied); if he will take steps to ensure that the funding of a primary health care team for Travellers living in Labre Park and the wider Bally-

fermot and Dublin 10 area is included in the HSE 2020 budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49285/19]

163. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health the reason there is no primary healthcare team for the Traveller community in Dublin 10 and specifically for the Labre Park halting site; if the possibility of providing a team will be investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49321/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 158 and 163 together.

The Department of Health, via the HSE, provides in excess of €10m, to support a range of targeted initiatives, programmes and supports to improve the health status of Travellers. These include:

- primary healthcare projects, counselling services, family support programmes and men's health projects;

- Traveller Health units and related staff;

- mental health promotion and suicide prevention services provided in a culturally sensitive manner, to reduce the stigma associated with mental health;

- Mental Health Service Coordinator for Travellers posts responsible for driving, managing and supporting the implementation of agreed improvement programmes and projects for Travellers.

Furthermore, the HSE employs a number of Public Health Nurses and related staff towards addressing priority health needs of members of the Traveller community.

The Department will allocate €17 billion to the HSE for the delivery of health services in 2020. The details of these services will be set out in the HSE National Service Plan for 2020. The plan will include specific measures to improve Traveller health, including a Traveller health action plan.

As the Deputy's question refers to a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

159. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of agency staff hired and-or engaged by his Department in the past five years to date; the cost per year of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49299/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Department of Health has not hired or engaged any agency staff in the past five years to date.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

160. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (detail supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49317/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Ser-

vice Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Vaccine Damage Compensation Scheme**

161. **Deputy Louise O'Reilly** asked the Minister for Health the cost of fighting a case (details supplied) over the past number of years; his plans to make each person who suffered narcolepsy having been administered the pandemrix influenza vaccine go to court against the State; his further plans and timeframe to address the outstanding cases in a manner in which such persons will not have to go through the courts, such as a no-fault compensation scheme. [49318/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I am pleased that the mediation process was successful in the recent case relating to the administration of the Pandemrix vaccine during the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic and that the parties have been able to come to a resolution without the necessity to continue with legal proceedings.

In October 2013, the Government approved (S180/46/01/0005B) the delegation to the State Claims Agency (SCA) of the management of claims in relation to individuals alleging the development of narcolepsy resulting from the administration of the pandemic vaccine. The management of the cases transferred to the SCA when the National Treasury Management Agency (Delegation of Claims Management Functions) (Amendment) Order 2013 (S.I. no 405 of 2013) was signed by the then Taoiseach on 15 October 2013. As such, I have no role as regards the conduct of this or future cases, including as regards the issue of costs relating to them.

However, the Programme for a Partnership Government includes a commitment to “put in place a scheme, on a no-fault basis, that will respond to the needs of people with disability arising from vaccination” and work is progressing with regard to this. An Expert Group was established in June of last year, under Judge Meenan, to examine the law in relation to personal injuries arising in the healthcare context and to explore alternative mechanisms by which claims could be managed more effectively, particularly from the perspective of the person on whose behalf a claim has been made. A report from this Expert Group is expected in the coming weeks, the recommendations of which will be taken into account as part of the development of any possible vaccine compensation scheme.

In addition, the Health Research Board recently completed a review of the evidence on vaccine injury redress programmes in other jurisdictions and this report will also be considered in conjunction with the Expert Group's recommendations.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

162. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49319/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

*Question No. 163 answered with Question No. 158.*

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

164. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the status of an appointment for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49322/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

*Question No. 165 answered with Question No. 134.*

### **Hospital Consultant Recruitment**

166. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health his plans to retain the services of a paediatric pain specialist (details supplied) at Our Lady's Children's Hospital, Crumlin, who may leave the service at the end of 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49354/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the Children's Health Ireland to respond to you directly, as soon as possible.

### **Mental Health Services Provision**

167. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the position in regard to the extension of the mental health facilities at Naas General Hospital, Naas, County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49355/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **HSE Properties**

168. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to plans to demolish a building (details supplied) in County Cork; and his views on whether appropriate measures were taken in the decision. [49360/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the management of the healthcare property estate, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you in relation to this matter.

### **Treatment Benefit Scheme Applications**

169. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Health the status of an application by a person (details supplied) under the treatment abroad scheme; the reason emails to the HSE PAD section of 1 and 6 November 2019 regarding the matter have not received a response; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49371/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

170. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if a hospital appointment will be expedited for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49379/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for sched-

uled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Disability Support Services**

171. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding State funding of the national platform for self-advocates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49401/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The National Platform of Self-Advocates is an advocacy service for people with intellectual disabilities which was established and is run by people with intellectual disabilities.

Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. The Department of Health does not fund organisations directly while the HSE can only fund organisations for the purpose of providing health services on its behalf.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the HSE for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Mental Health Services Staff**

172. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the staffing restrictions and embargo on the recruitment of clinical psychologists in the CHO 2 area in view of the ongoing waiting lists for treatment and assessment in CAMHS, early intervention services, adult mental health services and the ASD services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49403/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Mental Health Services Staff**

173. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Health the number of clinical psychologists employed in the CHO 2 area; the number of clinical psychologists recruited by the HSE in 2018 and to date in 2019 by county in the CHO 2 area in tabular form; his plans to recruit additional clinical psychologists to address the ongoing waiting lists in CAMHS, early intervention services, adult mental health services and the ASD services; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49405/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Thalidomide Victims Compensation**

174. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Health the Departments that have been obliged by court orders to provide discovery in respect of the action initiated by an association (details supplied); the number that have done so; if a review of the data necessary to achieve delivery of the required discovery documentation has commenced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49442/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** There are a number of cases concerning thalidomide before the High Court at present, which are being managed by the State Claims Agency on behalf of the Irish State.

The State Defendants in the proceedings are the Minister for Health and Children, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, the Attorney General and Ireland. An order for discovery was sought by the Plaintiff and was made by the High Court on 10 April, 2019. That order has neither been perfected nor served upon the State and accordingly the time for compliance with discovery obligations has not commenced to run.

An application is pending before the Court to vary the discovery ordered and this has not as yet been determined. Review of the data necessary to comply with the discovery order in the context of proceedings is ongoing and is necessarily the subject of legal advice and privilege. Accordingly, it is inappropriate for me to give further comment or detail in respect of the process until discovery has concluded and the proceedings resolved.

No State Defendant has been determined to be non-compliant with the discovery order in these proceedings.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

175. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Health if an appointment for a person (details supplied) will be scheduled; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49444/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Climate Action Plan**

176. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the initiatives to support paludiculture which will be financed under the climate action plan 2019. [49422/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department recognises wetlands and peat soils as an important carbon pool in the Irish landscape. Reducing emissions by water table manipulation has the potential to significantly reduce GHG emissions from these soils and is a means to positively contribute to our climate change mitigation ambitions. This is an important part of Agriculture's contribution to the emission reductions and is set out in the All of Government Climate Action Plan released in June 2019.

The Climate Action Plan targets at least 40,000 hectares of carbon rich soils (peatlands) under agricultural management to maintain low management intensity as part of our commitment. There is great potential for paludiculture to take advantage of this and generate sustainable production benefits without diminishing their environmental functions. The assessment of potential options for land use management of rewetted organic soils and research on the potential for productive use of rewetted peatlands, including paludiculture, are key actions within the Climate Action Plan for the better management of peatlands and soils.

Balancing between reducing our own footprint and committing to carbon removal through sequestration, be it afforestation or management of farmed peatlands, etc., is critical. This is the reason for the €3 million that has been assigned to my Department to carry out pilot projects in respect of carbon removal, which will include at its forefront a pilot measure on farmed peatland management.

Furthermore, Bord na Móna are also focusing on peatlands rehabilitation. The company's rehabilitation principles have always been to re-wet peat where possible and to work in tandem with nature. Bord na Móna's cutaway rehabilitation will mean that a heterogeneous mosaic of habitats will develop on the cutaway.

Bord na Móna has already rehabilitated 15,000 hectares of peatland and is developing new plans that will involve the enhanced rehabilitation of a greater area of peatland by 2025. Bord na Móna has recently announced a €1.6 billion investment plan which includes an accelerated peatland rehabilitation programme and while these activities will take place on non-agricultural soils my Department will be eager to learn from the knowledge gained by Bord na Móna's efforts in this area.

### **Renewable Energy Projects**

177. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to support the development of a biomass industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [48914/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Through the All-of-Government Climate Action Plan, my Department is working closely with other Government Departments to ensure Ireland's transition to a low carbon economy and society. While agriculture contributes to the increasing concentration of greenhouse gases, the sector also has the means to be part of the alleviation process and has a key role to play in transitioning to a competitive, low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050.

Ireland's long-term policy vision for the agriculture and land use sector is 'an approach to carbon neutrality which does not compromise the capacity for sustainable food production'.

While carbon neutrality is yet to be fully defined our policy approach is based on three principles:

- Reducing agriculture emissions;

- Increasing carbon sequestration; and
- The displacement and substitution of fossil fuel and energy intensive materials.

Indigenous renewable energy plays a vital role in our domestic fuel mix and will become even more important in the context of reducing our reliance on imported fuels and in meeting our challenging renewable energy targets for 2020 and 2030 and decarbonising our energy systems by 2050.

Ireland has a 16% target for renewable energy by 2020 and the production of indigenous biomass has a crucial role to play in helping us meet this renewable energy target and my Department has a key role to play in the supply of biomass materials in this regard.

Through the National Forestry Programme, my Department is committed to increasing the supply of biomass from Ireland's forests. In 2018, 40% of the wood fibre used in the Republic of Ireland was used for energy generation, mainly within the forest products sector, up from 34% a couple of years ago. This represents over 1.5 million cubic metres of wood fibre and includes, roundwood, sawmill and residues such as bark, sawdust and woodchip. The new Support Scheme for Renewable Heat is creating additional demand for biomass particular since the second phase was launched during the summer which will provide operational support for biomass boilers.

According to the All Ireland Roundwood Forecast 2016 – 2035, output from Irish forests is expected to double over the coming decades to around 8 million cubic metres. Most of this increased production will come from private forest owners. In fact, during 2018, total timber production from private forest owners exceeded 1 million cubic metres for the first time. In order to address the barriers that exist in mobilising this resource, my Department supports a number of targeted measures including the construction of forest roads to provide access to the timber, knowledge transfer groups to assist forest owners in managing their forests and grants for second thinning of broadleaves which provides an important source of local firewood.

The Department previously operated a bioenergy scheme to facilitate the establishment of energy crops (including willow and miscanthus) for use in renewable energy production. However, due to a low uptake, the scheme was suspended from 2016 and there are currently no plans to re-introduce support. Ongoing support for the production of biomass will continue to be provided under the Forestry Programme 2014-2020 which funds private afforestation and includes a specific "forestry for fibre" scheme.

My Department continues to consider all opportunities for further developments in the area of biomass in the context of the next Forestry Programme and the next CAP Strategic programme, which is currently being developed.

### **Forestry Data**

178. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of native woodland trees to be planted on former bogland in each of the years 2019 to 2022, by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42320/19]

179. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of native woodland trees to be planted outside of former bogland in each of the years 2019 to 2022, by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42321/19]

180. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of native woodland trees planted in each of the years 2007 to 2018, inclusive, by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42319/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 178 to 180, inclusive, together.

Under the current Forestry Programme 2014 -2020, the planting of native woodlands is supported through a grant of €6,200 per hectare and 15 year premiums of €680 per hectare. Interest in planting has increased year-on-year since the commencement of the programme in 2015.

In order to further encourage the planting of native woodlands, my Department has launched a Woodland Environmental Fund (WEF) initiative. This provides an opportunity for businesses to partner with the Government and Irish landowners to support the national effort to plant additional native trees. The WEF involves an additional once off top up payment of €1,000 per hectare paid by the business to the landowner. There has been a positive reaction from the business community to this scheme, with An Post and Accenture already signed up and other businesses submitting formal expressions of interest in participating in the scheme. My colleague Minister Doyle, will be addressing a gathering of interested businesses on 28 November 2019 to further promote the planting of native woodland under the WEF.

Furthermore, last month, my colleague Richard Bruton TD, Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment and I announced that Coillte Nature and Bord na Móna are collaborating on a new project which will see bogs that are no longer being used for peat production, transformed into rich native woodlands.

This initiative will see approximately 3 million native trees being established, mainly through the direct seeding method, across 1,500 hectares of Bord na Móna land over the next 3 years. The focus will be on growing a mix of native Irish trees such as Downy Birch, Scots Pine, Alder and other broadleaves (Hazel and Holly etc.). The Bord na Móna lands identified for the project are in counties Offaly, Laois, Westmeath and Tipperary. Teams from Coillte Nature and Bord na Móna will work together to provide the management, forestry, nursery and technical expertise to establish and maintain the woodlands.

A target of 450 hectares of native woodland is set for each year under the current Forestry Programme 2014 -2020. This would equate to an estimated 1,485,000 trees. Targets for 2021 and 2022 will be set under the new Forestry Programme.

In terms of the number of trees planted in each of the years 2007 to 2018, an estimate is shown in the table at the link, using the average figure of 3,300 stems per hectare for native woodlands. The figures from 2015 onwards are based on native woodland establishment under GPCs 9 and 10 under the current National Forestry Programme. There are also native and broadleaf trees planed as part of a mixed plantation.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2019-11-27\_pq179-27-11-2019\_en.docx ">Native Woodland Trees</a>]

### Forestry Data

181. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of Sitka spruce trees planted in each of the years 2007 to 2018, inclusive, by county in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [42318/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department makes available on its website a substantial number of forestry-related statistics, which are updated monthly or annually as required.

The number of hectares of conifers planted in the years requested is provided in the table at the link. Generally, a count of trees planted is not made, but an average of 2,500 stems per hectare is standard for conifers. This allows for failures, etc. Proper management of the site ensures that trees are thinned at regular intervals throughout the rotation, before final harvesting.

[<a href="https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/debates/questions/supportingDocumentation/2019-11-27\_pq181-27-11-2019\_en.docx ">Spruce Trees Planted</a>]

### **Grant Aid**

182. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if grant aid will be provided for low emission slurry spreaders and-or make them zero VAT rated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41730/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Low Emission Slurry Spreading (LESS) Measure one of the suite of seven measures available under TAMS II and provides grants for Low Emission Slurry Spreading equipment.

To date, 1,450 farmers have received €19.04m in grant assistance to purchase LESS equipment under the TAMS II scheme and a further 1,658 farmers have an outstanding approval to purchase equipment.

Full details of all items grant aided under TAMS II are available on the Department's website.

Policy on VAT is matter for my colleague, the Minister for Finance.

### **Alternative Farm Enterprises**

183. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide incentives for the planting of alternative crops for the bio-economy to commence the process of adapting land use that will enable Ireland to meet its climate change targets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [41731/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Government's policy position for the agriculture sector is an approach to carbon neutrality which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production. There are three strands to my Department's approach to carbon neutrality:

1. reducing agricultural emissions;
2. increasing carbon sequestration; and
3. displacing and substituting fossil fuel and energy intensive materials.

The All-of-Government Climate Action Plan to Tackle Climate Disruption sets a series of step-up measures and underpinning actions and proposed targets for all sectors including the agriculture, forestry and land use sector. One of these is to achieve 26.8 Mt CO<sub>2</sub>e abatement through LULUCF actions, including the planting of 8,000 ha of forestry per annum. My De-

partment is fully committed to mobilising the LULUCF credits as outlined in the 'All of Government action plan for climate change'. To achieve these challenging targets, it will require immediate action through early adoption and high levels of take-up of the identified actions across our 139,000 plus family farms.

These credits provide a means to assist the agricultural sector contributing to Ireland's ambition on climate action.

Forestry provides resources for the bioenergy supply chain, the wider bio-economy and timber products that can act as a less carbon-intensive substitute of other materials in construction and other related sectors as well as through the displacement of fossil fuels. Ireland has a 16% target for renewable energy by 2020 and the production of indigenous biomass has a crucial role to play in helping us meet this renewable energy target. My Department has a key role to play in the supply of biomass materials for the renewable energy sector and continues to make considerable investment to support indigenous biomass supply through the afforestation programme.

The mid-term review of the Forestry Programme has seen substantial increases in the grants and premiums paid for growing trees suitable for fibre and biomass. The duration of the premium has also increased from 10 to 15 years. It is hoped that these measures will stimulate increased planting of crops such as eucalyptus and poplar which together with forest thinnings will provide increased material for energy.

My Department is considering all opportunities for further developments in the area of biomass in the context of the next Forestry Programme and the next CAP Strategic programme.

### **Beef Exports**

184. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the export markets that have different specifications from those set out in a document (details supplied) which restricts beef from particular holdings here being exported to such countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49186/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The document referred to by the Deputy is the World Organisation of Animal Health (OIE) Terrestrial Animal Health Code, specifically in relation to Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and the recommendations to manage health risks associated with the presence of the BSE agent in cattle.

Last year, Irish beef was exported to nearly 70 countries worldwide according to CSO trade statistics. Of these, a small number of importing markets mandate protective BSE-related restrictions which are more stringent than those recommended by the World Organisation of Animal Health (OIE).

The third country markets which currently specify more stringent conditions for Irish beef on this basis are Algeria, Barbados, China, Egypt, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore (bone-in beef) and Turkey. In 2019, Ireland exported beef to three of these markets - China, Saudi Arabia and Singapore.

My Department works continuously on expanding market access for Irish meat and meat products across a range of markets. In tandem, we continue to work to maintain access to existing markets as well as to simplify certification procedures and improve certification conditions in existing markets.

Our ultimate aim is to negotiate veterinary health conditions for the export of meat and meat

products to third countries that do not place an unacceptably high burden on Irish meat exporters. However, this is a lengthy, technically detailed process and is subject to agreement with the importing country. Where there are stringent technical demands for the export of meat to a Third Country, my Department seeks to continue negotiations with such countries to remove or reduce the impact of the requirement.

### **Animal Disease Controls**

185. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the information retained by his Department on historical and recent BSE cases here relating to the animal, the herdowner and-or the holding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49187/19]

186. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the length of time his Department retains information on historical BSE cases; the persons or bodies this information is shared with; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49188/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 185 and 186 together.

Details of all positive BSE cases since 1989 are retained in my Department. The cases contain important epidemiological information and assist in assessing future BSE and TSE risk.

The European database on BSE cases is managed by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), who was delegated that responsibility by the European Commission. There is a mandatory requirement to report all positive cases to the EFSA. Annual returns and reports of positive cases are also made to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

### **Animal Diseases**

187. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a holding on which an animal with BSE was discovered poses a higher risk to the food chain than a holding that never had a case of BSE; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49189/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As part of the regulatory controls for food safety, there is a State veterinary presence in every meat plant and this Vet conducts an ante-mortem inspection on every animal presented for slaughter. In addition, and on a precautionary basis, all specified risk material must be removed from all animals slaughtered and this is also verified by the State veterinarian present in the plant.

No evidence has been found to show that a holding on which an animal with BSE was discovered in the past poses a higher risk to the food chain than a holding that never had a case of BSE.

### **Beef Exports**

188. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the World Organisation for Animal Health considers that beef from an animal which has come from a holding on which a historical case of BSE was confirmed should be treated differently when

being exported; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49190/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As part of the regulatory controls for food safety, there is a State veterinary presence in every meat plant and this veterinarian conducts an ante-mortem inspection on every animal presented for slaughter. In addition, and on a precautionary basis, all specified risk material must be removed from all animals slaughtered and this is also verified by the State veterinarian present in the plant.

No evidence has been found to show that a holding on which an animal with BSE was discovered in the past poses a higher risk to the food chain than a holding that never had a case of BSE.

However, the conditions applied by third countries importing beef from Ireland are determined by control authorities in these countries.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

189. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of agency staff hired and-or engaged by his Department in the past five years to date; the cost per year of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49289/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department employs staff across a broad range of skill sets including Administrative, Veterinary Inspectors, Forest and Agricultural Inspectors, Technical Agricultural Officers, Engineers and Laboratory Staff to meet its business needs.

Recruitment campaigns take place periodically in partnership with the Public Appointments Service (PAS) and by internal competitions for staff within my Department.

I can confirm that my Department does not engage agency staff to meet its business needs.

### **Agriculture Scheme Payments**

190. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a farmer (details supplied) in County Kerry who sold his animals at the mart to a dealer or agent will not receive payment under the beef exceptional aid measure for animals he reared and fattened; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49334/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The objective of the Beef Exceptional Aid Measure (BEAM) is to provide temporary exceptional adjustment aid to farmers in the beef sector in Ireland subject to the conditions set out in EU Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2019/1132. Applications for BEAM were accepted from 19th August to 20th September 2019.

An application was received from the person named on the 20th August 2019 and a scheme acceptance letter issued on the 11th October 2019 which detailed 30 animals that had been slaughtered in the relevant period, and were eligible for payment under the scheme.

This letter also informed the person named of their right to have this data reviewed. Such a request was received on the 1st of November 2019 accompanied by a list of tag numbers of animals that the person named believed should be eligible for payment.

The Terms and Conditions (T&Cs) of the scheme state that, where an animal is presented for slaughter within 30 days of purchase by an agent or dealer as defined in the T&Cs, payment may issue in respect of the previous herdowner provided they are otherwise eligible and a participant in the scheme. All of the animals that relate to the tag numbers provided, and their associated movements, were investigated by staff from my Department who established that none of them met the criteria required for the payment to revert to a previous herdowner

A letter confirming the original decision issued to the person named on the 19th of November 2019. This letter also informed the person named of their right to appeal this outcome to the Agriculture Appeals Office.

### **Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme**

191. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if an application by a person (details supplied) for TAMS 11 will be included in respect of tranche 14 of TAMS 11; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49353/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The person named submitted an application for grant-aid under the Dairy Equipment Scheme. This application has now passed all the administrative checks, and the ranking & selection process. The application is subject to a further final technical examination and, if successful, approval will issue to the person named in due course.

### **Organic Farming Scheme**

192. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the statistics relating to organic REPS (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49391/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Organic Farming Scheme is one of the most successful schemes under our current Rural Development Programme. A budget of €56m was allocated to fund the Scheme opened during the period 2014 to 2020 which was the largest allocation ever to an Organics support scheme.

The Scheme has more than achieved its targets in terms of new land converted and the maintenance of organic land. The area of land under organic production has expanded dramatically as a direct result of my Department's investment. Latest figures indicate that there are now some 72,000 hectares under organic production, an increase of nearly 50% on the position at the start of the Programme in 2014.

As a further vote of confidence in the organics sector by this Government, my colleague Minister Doyle established an Organics Strategy Group last year comprising relevant stakeholders and state bodies. Part of the remit of the Strategy Group was to consider the case for a possible re-opening of the Organic Farming Scheme. They recommended that it should be re-opened but on a targeted basis. The sectors targeted were areas for which there is a clear market demand, and which are critical to the further development of the Organic Sector, namely horticulture, cereals and dairy. This recommendation acknowledged that the budget was very limited given the success of the current scheme and the overall spending within the RDP.

The Scheme was opened for applications up to the 19 December 2018 and a total of 225 applications were received. A total of 58 applications were either withdrawn or were deemed

ineligible. Following the ranking and selection process, one applicant withdrew, 55 were successful and 111 farmers received letters informing them that they had been unsuccessful. All unsuccessful applicants were given a right of appeal to the Organic Unit of my Department. It should be noted that in 95% of the unsuccessful applications, the predominant enterprises were not from the targeted sectors identified when the Scheme was launched.

It is important to note that this was a targeted re-opening and that I fully expect that there will be a new Organics Scheme under the next CAP. I would encourage all stakeholders to make their views known on the shape of this future scheme as part of the wider CAP consultation process.

### **Beef Industry**

193. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to get the beef task force up and running; when the first meeting will take place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49392/19]

195. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when the outcome of the tender process for the three independent studies to be conducted as a result of the beef agreement reached in September 2019 will be announced; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49394/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 193 and 195 together.

As the Deputy will be aware, the inaugural Beef Taskforce meeting scheduled for 14th October was prevented from proceeding. However, since then the independent chair and my Department continue to engage proactively with Taskforce members with a view to both progressing the implementation of the provisions of the agreement.

My Department and its agencies continue to progress the commitments which they signed up to under the Agreement. The full text of the Agreement between beef sector stakeholders, along with an update on the progress made on the action points to date, is available on my Department's website: <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmingsectors/beef/beeftaskforce/>.

An immediate increase in a range of bonuses was announced as part of the 15 September Agreement. It has been confirmed to my Department that this bonus system is now in place.

Initiatives in the Agreement aimed at improving information along the supply chain included the commissioning of the following reports: an independent review of market and customer requirements; an independent examination of the price composition of the total value of the animal along the supply chain; and a summary of competition law issues as relevant to the Irish beef sector. My Department has issued the Request for Tender for these reports, with a deadline for receipt of Tender Responses of 12 noon on Thursday 5th December. This will enable award of the tender before the end of 2019.

In relation to market transparency initiatives, my Department:

- has published an expert report on mechanical carcase classification review;
- has introduced an appeals system for manual grading; and
- has initiated a consultation process on the transposition of the Unfair Trading Practices (UTP) Directive, with a deadline for submission of 13 December.

Bord Bia has developed a beef market price index model based on 3 components: cattle price index, beef market price index (retail and wholesale) and an offal price indicator. This is now available on the Bord Bia website: <https://www.bordbia.ie/farmers-growers/farmers/prices-markets/beef-market-tracking/>.

Teagasc is significantly advanced in the first stage of the scientific review of the Quality Payment Grid(QPS).

My Department is also proactively engaging with several potential beef Producer Organisations, which have the potential to strengthen the bargaining power of beef farmers in the supply chain. Two beef producer organisations have been formally recognised by my Department in recent months.

I established the Beef Market Taskforce to provide the leadership to develop a sustainable pathway for the future of the beef sector in terms of economic, environmental and social sustainability. As I have previously stated, it is in the interests of everyone involved in the beef sector that the work of the Taskforce goes ahead. I hope that all parties will agree to come together around the table as soon as possible in order to progress this important work.

### **Beef Imports**

194. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the quantities of chilled and frozen beef imported from Poland in 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49393/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** According to Central Statistic Office (CSO) figures, I can confirm that from January to December 2018, Ireland imported 1,251 tonnes of fresh/chilled and frozen beef to the value of €4.6 million from Poland.

From January to September 2019, we imported 777 tonnes of fresh/chilled and frozen beef to the value of €3 million from Poland.

*Question No. 195 answered with Question No. 193.*

### **Food Promotion**

196. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps being taken to counteract vegan propaganda which is particularly damaging to Ireland and its rural communities in view of the unique production and export capacity for beef here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49395/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Meat and Dairy Facts is a joint industry campaign to direct consumers towards science-based information about the nutritional benefits of meat and dairy, and the efforts that Irish farmers are taking to protect the environment and care for their animals. Its members include Bord Bia, Dairy Industry Ireland, the Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association, the Irish Farmers Association, Meat Industry Ireland and the National Dairy Council.

I support this campaign to present factual information about the important role meat and dairy plays in our diet, and to demonstrate that Irish meat and dairy production meets the highest standards of food safety and quality, environmental sustainability and animal welfare.

Earlier this year I highlighted that Irish meat and dairy are critically important elements in a healthy, balanced diet, especially for children. I emphasised that Irish livestock farming, based on grazing in temperate grasslands, is among the most climate efficient in the world.

### **Forestry Management**

197. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the estimated area of peaty soils under the ownership of Coillte that has been converted to forestry; the estimated net carbon losses as a result of the practice; the remedial measures proposed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49426/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The management of the forest estate is a matter for, and the responsibility of, Coillte as a commercial State Body and the information requested is an operational matter for Coillte. I have referred the Deputy's question to Coillte and have requested that a response should issue within 10 days.

### **Food Labelling**

198. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the reliability of labelling and traceability structures throughout the food industry with particular reference to imports from third countries; the average number of checks or tests carried out in 2018 and 2019; the way in which this compares with previous years; the number of cases detected which indicate a failure to meet the required standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49445/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Food products placed on the marketplace are covered by a range of legislation designed to ensure that products supplied to consumers are of the highest safety standards. My Department plays a part in the enforcement of this legislation along with other Government departments and State Agencies such as the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) and the Health Service Executive. The FSAI is the body responsible for enforcement of regulations governing traceability, labelling and provision of food information to customers.

Primary responsibility under EU law for the safety and traceability of food placed on the market lies with food business operators. The role of National Competent Agencies is to verify compliance with this requirement. This is done via a combination of inspecting establishments and auditing the food safety management systems which operators have in place. These controls are applied at different stages in the food supply chain. Regulation (EC) No. 178 of 2002 sets out the general principles and requirements of EU food law and stipulates that food business operators must, at all stages of production, processing and distribution within their business, ensure food law requirements are satisfied. In regard to traceability, the regulations require that food business operators have what is referred to as the 'one step forward, one step backward' traceability system. There are additional requirements for certain fishery and aquaculture products under the Control Regulation (Regulation 1224/2009 and Implementing Regulation 404/2011) from first sale to subsequent stages of production, processing and distribution up to retail.

My Department has a permanent veterinary presence at all of its approved slaughter plants. Controls at plants only engaged in secondary processing are carried out at a frequency based on an annual risk assessment. An annual audit of imported products is carried out in each Department-approved plant, including checks on physical identity, labelling and documentary checks.

Extra veterinary checks are carried out on selected consignments of foods imported into DAFM-approved establishments from other EU Member States or from Third Countries outside the EU. These checks include, physical checks of product condition, checks of accompanying documentation and checks of labelling and health markings.

The import of products of animal origin from third countries is governed by a comprehensive and robust legislative framework laid down at EU level, controlled by Member States in the first instance, and audited by the European Commission's Directorate General for Health and Food Safety (formally the FVO), to ensure compliance with all of the relevant food safety standards. The legislation imposes health and supervisory requirements designed to ensure that imported products meet standards equivalent to those required for production and trade between Member States. Border Inspection Posts are operated by my Department. Import control procedures on products of animal and fish origin are highly prescriptive and strictly audited by the Commission to ensure compliance. Inspection reports are published on the Directorate General for Health and Food Safety's website.

I am satisfied that the controls and checks in place and enforced by my Department ensure that Irish consumers are protected and correctly informed when they purchase and consume food products. Checks for products of animal origin numbered 2,858 in 2018 and 2,898 to date in 2019. All consignments are documentary and identity checked and physical checks, including sampling of products, are carried out according to European regulations.

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) has service contracts in place with the official agencies performing official controls, to verify compliance with the extensive requirements of food labelling legislation, in these establishments. The FSAI reports in detail on the number of inspections and checks carried out, and non-compliance findings.

## **Fishing Industry**

199. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which fishing remains a viable option for fishing dependent families nationally; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49446/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) provides the framework for the long term conservation and sustainability of fish stocks around our shores and is designed to ensure the long term sustainability of fishing in Ireland and throughout EU waters. The CFP specifically calls for the progressive restoration and maintenance of populations of fish stocks above biomass levels capable of producing Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY). To achieve this, the FMSY exploitation rate shall be achieved for all stocks from January 1st 2020. This should ultimately lead to healthy fish stocks, higher quotas for both Irish and EU fishermen and lead to more sustainable fishing patterns.

Scientific information on the state of the fisheries exploited by the Irish fleet is compiled by the Marine Institute and is published in the Stock Book each year. The most recent Stock Book, 2019, which was published last week, contains 74 stocks that are subject to the scientific advice of the Marine Institute. From the 74 stocks, 35 are assessed as being sustainably fished in 2019. This number has grown every year since 2013. This, in turn, leads to the number of stocks being over-fished declining from 22 in 2014 to 13 in 2019.

The preparation for the 2019 December Fisheries Council is well underway. At the December Council, quotas for 2020 will be negotiated on the basis of a proposal produced by the European Commission that is informed by the best available scientific advice. From the initial

proposal, I am pleased that the scientific advice supports increases in a number of stocks of importance to Ireland such as Haddock, Monkfish and Megrims in the Celtic Sea. This shows that the many years of intensive, industry-led conservation measures are paying off.

Provided we can successfully navigate the potential difficulties arising from Brexit, in cooperation with our EU27 partners, I am confident that, through the CFP, we will be able to ensure the sustainability of our fish stocks and, in turn, the economic viability of our fishing fleet and fish processors, thereby supporting the families and communities that depend on a vibrant fishing industry.

## **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

200. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he can encourage mitigation action in respect of greenhouse gases with the minimum impact on agriculture production; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49447/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The All-of-Government Climate Action Plan to tackle climate breakdown sets out a target for emissions from the sector in 2030 of between 17.5 and 19 Mt CO<sub>2</sub> eq. by achieving between 16.5 and 18.5 Mt CO<sub>2</sub> eq. cumulative abatement over the period 2021 to 2030 for the agriculture sector. In addition, the sector will also deliver an additional 26.8 Mt CO<sub>2</sub> eq. through better land use management such as afforestation and improved management of peaty grasslands.

The plan identifies 34 actions for the sector that will contribute to our transition to a low carbon economy and society. These include abatement measures, carbon sequestration measures and displacement of fossil fuels and reflect our three-pillar policy approach to achieving carbon neutrality without comprising sustainable food production.

The actions in this plan are informed by the recent Teagasc Marginal Cost Abatement Curve report (MACC) - An Analysis of Abatement Potential of Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Irish Agriculture 2021-2030 as an identifiable suite of actions for delivery. These actions include both efficiency measures such as the Dairy EBI programme and technical measures such as changes in fertiliser type or low emissions slurry spreading as well as a series of forestry and bioeconomy measures. Achieving our 2030 emissions reduction target will require early adoption and high levels of take-up of all measures across all our 139,000 farms.

My department has recently published a document entitled 'Ag-Climatise' – A Draft National Climate and Air Roadmap for the Agriculture Sector to 2030 and beyond for public consultation. This main aim of this consultation document is to translate our overall sectoral ambitions into more detailed actions and targets for delivery over the coming years.

The roadmap will also take account of the outcomes of other recent public consultations on the National Air Pollution Control Programme, the Code of Good Practice to Reduce Ammonia Emissions, the 2019 Nitrates Derogation Review and the Sectoral Adaptation Plan for Agriculture Forestry and Seafood.

## **Cereal Sector**

201. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he remains satisfied regarding the future prospects for the cereal growing

sector with a view to ensuring a reliable income for those involved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49448/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The tillage sector is an integral component of our Agri-food industry, making a significant contribution to overall National agricultural output. The Irish cereals sector plays a significant role in the supply of high quality grain to the feed industry, providing raw material for the food and drinks industry and is a key source of seed production.

I acknowledge that cereal production has experienced difficult challenges in recent times particularly from poor climatic conditions, however my Department continues to provide significant supports to the sector.

The Tillage Capital Investment Scheme under TAMS II covering specific areas of investment for tillage farmers with in excess of €14.5 million distributed to over 860 farmers to date.

The continuation of the coupled EU Protein Aid Scheme for 2018 has resulted in over €2.84m being paid to 681 growers. This Scheme was available again in 2019 and I can confirm that this valuable support scheme will be available in 2020. This coupled payment is worth approx. €3m/annum to tillage farmers.

In further support for the sector, my Department continues to provide a high quality and valuable official crop seed certification scheme, as well as an extensive national crop variety evaluation programme, providing invaluable information to growers on the latest varieties available.

The agri-food sector continues to explore the development of novel markets for cereal products seeking to improve competitiveness and sustainability with Irish malting barley demand increasing with growth in demand for Irish distilled spirits such as whiskey.

Cereals are therefore a significant stakeholder in our agri-food industry from a supply/food safety and sustainability viewpoint and the continuance of an efficient and viable tillage sector in Ireland is vital.

I can assure the Deputy that I, and the Government, remain fully committed to this important sector which plays a key role in the development of the wider agri-food industry.

## **Poultry Industry**

202. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he expects the poultry sector to grow in the short, medium and long term; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49449/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The value of Irish poultry exports in 2018 increased by 1% to over €280 million according to CSO trade data, with the United Kingdom accounting for some 78% of this figure in value terms. Other EU markets now account for just under 10% of Irish exports, with France leading the way, followed closely by Finland and the Netherlands. Exports to third country markets amount to around 10% of export totals, with South Africa showing the biggest growth for Irish exporters, growing by 14% in 2018 to just under €30 million.

Irish production again hit record levels in 2018, with 98.6 million birds slaughtered in export-approved plants, an increase of 3.3% compared to 2017, with most of the increase evident

in broiler and duck production. Irish poultry production is on course to exceed the 100 million mark in 2019.

The market access process can be lengthy one and is largely determined by the requirements of importing countries. My Department's priorities in this regard are decided in consultation with stakeholders and opportunities for poultry meat exports to a number of third country markets, including Malaysia, South Korea and Indonesia are currently being pursued. Earlier this year, agreement was reached with the South African authorities on a revised veterinary health certificate for the export of poultry meat permitting the use of marinades/sauces of non-animal origin. The South African authorities also agreed a separate bilateral certificate for the export of butter-basted whole turkeys from Ireland.

While the outlook for the sector remains broadly positive, the sector continues to face challenges particularly the ongoing uncertainty around Brexit. In this context, the pursuit and development of new markets is an ongoing and central component of the strategic development of the agri-food sector, as evidenced by the market development theme of Food Wise 2025. As in other meat sectors, global trade conditions will be crucial in determining the outlook for the Irish poultry sector over the medium to longer term.

### **Bovine Disease Controls**

203. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the trends discovered in the extermination of bovine tuberculosis; the areas in which a breakdown seems to have occurred; the causes of each; the action taken or to be taken to address the issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49450/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Ireland's bovine TB Programme has had many successes since its inception in 1954 when approximately 80% of cattle herds and 22% of cows in the country were infected with bTB. In the year 2000, nearly 11,000 herds endured a bTB restriction while 40,000 reactors were identified. Now, Ireland has approximately 3,800 herds experiencing bTB outbreaks each year, with around 17,000 cattle declared reactors annually.

This period of rapid improvement in bTB incidence coincided with the implementation of a modern IT disease-management system and the implementation of a wildlife programme. While bTB levels overall are historically lower than ever, since 2016 there has been a gradual increase in disease trends. This highlight the need for the Programme to continuously adapt as factors influencing disease transmission change.

My Department's TB eradication Programme aims to drive bovine TB disease levels down towards the target of eradication by 2030. It is focussed on measures which will further reduce transmission of bTB. In the coming weeks, I will be launching a renewed strategy underpinned by the principle of supporting and empowering farmers to reduce the bTB risk to their cattle by making informed choices to protect their herd and their neighbour's herds. Equally, there is a particular focus on assisting herdowners whose herds are affected with bTB and to clear their herds of infection.

Stakeholders have recognised that further preventative measures are required if the ambition of eradication by 2030 is to be achieved. Steadily reducing the risk of disease transmission is the best way in which support can be provided to all Irish farmers – those whose herds are impacted by bTB and those whose herds are clear and who wish to remain free of the disease. The recommendations made by the bTB Stakeholders Forum have informed the development

of this strategy, and stakeholder involvement and leadership will continue to be critical to successfully eradicating bTB.

The risks associated with each potential transmission channel will be reduced through a series of coordinated measures, which will be applied in addition to the existing programme and in full compliance with the EU requirements for bTB eradication.

While the strategy is still being finalised, some of its central themes will be:

1. Reducing the spread of bTB via cattle to cattle transmission.
2. Reduce transmission at the cattle/wildlife interface
3. Improving farmers' understanding of risk with clearer communication
4. Greater stakeholder leadership, ownership and involvement; and
5. Continually improve programme effectiveness through review and amendments

In addition where higher levels of bTB are occurring in certain areas, my Department will put in place High Intensity TB action plans to address the risks and reduce disease spread. My Department has already implemented a High Intensity TB plan in the Cavan/Monaghan area and a similar plan is currently being rolled out in certain DEDs in County Clare.

### **Food Wise 2025 Strategy**

204. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which objectives and targets as set out by Food Wise 2025 are being achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49451/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Food Wise 2025 is the current ten-year strategy for the agri-food sector and underlines the sector's unique and special position within the Irish economy. It identifies the opportunities and challenges facing the sector and provides an enabling strategy that will allow the sector to develop and prosper. Food Wise includes more than 400 specific recommendations, spread across the five cross-cutting themes of environmental sustainability, market development, competitiveness, innovation and human capital.

If these recommendations are implemented, the expert committee which drew up the Food Wise 2025 Strategy, believed that the following growth projections are achievable by 2025: increasing the value of agri-food exports by 85% to €19 billion; increasing value added in the sector by 70% to in excess of €13 billion; and increasing the value of primary production by 65% to almost €10 billion. With regard to employment, Food Wise foresees the creation of 23,000 additional jobs in the agri-food sector all along the supply chain from primary production to high value added product development.

In July 2019, I launched the fourth annual progress report of Food Wise 2025, Steps to Success 2019. This showed that by 2018, estimated exports had increased by almost 20%, primary production increased by over 13% and the sector's value addition to the economy was over 24% compared to the baseline.

As of quarter 2 2019, of the 376 detailed actions which were due to commence by 2019 or are ongoing actions; 87% have been achieved or substantial action has been undertaken and the remainder have commenced and are progressing well.

## Animal Welfare

205. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he continues to monitor all aspects of animal welfare including canine and non-sporting equines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49452/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I am fully committed to promoting good practices that respect the welfare of all animals and my Department devotes considerable resources to protecting animal welfare and in dealing with breaches of animal welfare legislation.

Officials from my Department are directly involved in monitoring animal welfare on farms as part of their inspection duties in the areas of animal health, food safety, transportation and welfare. My Department also actively works via the regional Early Warning System to ensure that potential welfare problems in farming are identified at an early stage and, wherever possible, avoided.

I would encourage anyone who has evidence of a breach of animal welfare to report it to the Animal Welfare Hotline operated by my Department. The phone numbers of the hotline are as follows: Call Save: 076 1064408; Phone: 01 6072379

Where breaches of animal welfare are suspected, these can also be emailed to [animalwelfare@agriculture.gov.ie](mailto:animalwelfare@agriculture.gov.ie).

It is important to point out that control in respect of animal welfare is a matter that is also dealt with by a wide range of organisations not just my Department. In the case of non-farmed animals, a vital role is played by An Garda Síochána, Local Authorities and authorised officers of the ISPCA and DSPCA. These latter are some of the many recipients of substantial ex-gratia funding which my Department provides to underpin important work done by many organisations in the area of supporting animal welfare.

In December 2018, I announced the largest ever Department allocation of funding to 108 animal welfare organisations of €2.75m.

An advertisement was placed in the national press earlier this year inviting applications from welfare bodies for funding in respect of their activities in 2020. Applications for funding from animal welfare bodies are assessed and awards made on the basis of certain criteria, including the level and type of assistance provided by the organisation in the delivery of care and welfare services to animals and the level of funding raised from other sources to support welfare activities. To date, 110 applications have been received. These are currently being processed and I expect to make an announcement on funding by the end of the year.

## Brexit Supports

206. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which financial supports and-or incentives are in place to address the negative impact of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49453/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The government recognises that Brexit will have negative impacts on the Irish economy and, as a result, I have introduced a number of supports for farmers and the agri-food sector to assist in address-

ing the challenges posed by Brexit. These include:

- the €300 million Brexit Loan Scheme for Brexit-impacted SMEs and mid-cap businesses. The funding arrangements ensure that at least 40% of the fund is available to food businesses. Up to 15th November 2019, 802 loans have been approved of which 212 to the value of approx. €46.6m have been sanctioned and 37 of these, to the value of €9.5m, relate to food businesses.

- the DBEI/DAFM “Future Growth Loan Scheme” will make up to €300 million of long-term strategic investment loans available to eligible Irish businesses, including farmers and the agri-food & seafood sectors. Businesses have been able to apply for loan eligibility through the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) since 17th April 2019. As of 15th November 2019, 1,906 loans are approved of which 683 are farmers, and 227 are food companies. Of these, 592 loans to the value of €120m have been sanctioned, and of these 592 loans, 283 are farmers with a total sanction amount of €32.7m, and 56 are food companies for a value of €20m.

- A market prioritisation exercise undertaken by Bord Bia to identify priority markets across all food and drinks categories;

- tailored supports and analysis are being provided to food companies through Bord Bia’s Brexit Barometer;

- an intensified series of trade missions to develop and grow new markets has taken place.

In Budget 2020, the Government announced that it will provide a ‘no-deal’ contingency fund to support our most vulnerable sectors, with up to €650 million available overall, to be activated in tranches as the full impacts of Brexit emerge. €110 million will be made available for the agri-food sector in the first tranche, to be supplemented by any exceptional aid provided from the EU.

The provision of immediate supports for our beef sector will be a first priority, as will support for our fishing fleet. We also want to support food companies to re-orient towards new products and markets, and to support other sectors to improve their competitiveness.

While supports cannot fully address the negative effects of a no-deal for the agri-food and fisheries sectors, this first tranche of supports will be used to ameliorate the immediate impact on farmers and fishermen, as the full impact of a no-deal Brexit crystallises, and to make some of the adjustments needed to improve resilience for businesses in the face of new market realities. Of course, we await developments in the UK over the coming weeks, which will determine whether a no-deal exit is likely at the end of January 2020.

### **Artisan Food Sector**

207. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the degree to which opportunities continue to exist for the artisan food sector; the degree to which the industry has grown over the past three years; his expectations for the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49454/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Artisan and speciality food businesses can have a significant impact on local rural economies and their importance is acknowledged in the Food Wise 2025 strategy. Growth prospects for the sector are positive overall, driven by increased consumer interest in the provenance of food, environmental concerns, health and a desire to support the local economy.

A range of supports for this particular sector is available both from my Department and in links with other Government Departments.

I understand that approximately 500 artisan and speciality food companies with a turnover of between €100,000 to €3.5m are registered with Bord Bia for supports and services they offer, include marketing assistance, specialised training, capacity building and promotion.

Funding under the Rural Innovation & Development Fund is provided by my Department for initiatives designed to promote agri-food tourism in rural areas. Agri-food tourism broadly is the practice of offering an activity or activities in rural areas to visit areas of well-known agricultural produce and to sample and taste the local or regional cuisine or specialties. It also encompasses local food, farmer and artisan market schemes that support and are paired with local and seasonal food producers and artisan crafts. Following the 2019 call for proposals, I announced funding totalling €243,000 for twelve agri-food tourism projects in June this year.

Last year, together with my colleague the Minister for Rural and Community Development, I launched the 'LEADER Food Initiative'. This funding is provided from my Department under the Rural Development Programme (RDP), and is delivered using the LEADER methodology via the Department of Rural and Community Development. It supports new and existing artisan, micro and small food producers to address emerging challenges through investment in areas such as capital equipment, market development, competitiveness and innovation. I understand that 34 projects with a total value of more than €1.9 million have been approved under the Scheme to date.

The Department of Business Enterprise and Innovation also provide funding for local food initiatives through the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs), thirty one dedicated teams located in the Local Authorities nationwide which provide expert advice and guidance to all small businesses.

Taken together, all of these initiatives support farm and local community diversification and help farmers and small food businesses to connect with the wider community. From a Government perspective, they provide a collaborative framework for different Departments and agencies to work together for the development of the Small Business food sector.

### **National Broadband Plan Implementation**

208. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when premises that will be serviced by broadband connection points will be fully connected under the national broadband plan. [49398/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Government recognises the need to roll out high speed broadband as quickly as possible and is conscious that the full rollout of the National Broadband Plan (NBP) State intervention area will take a number of years.

Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) are locations of community importance across Ireland such as community centres, parish halls and schools. The BCPs have been specifically selected by the local authorities so that they can provide public Wi-Fi and other facilities to support mini digital/enterprise hubs to the local community in advance of the main NBP deployment. Approximately 300 Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) will receive an early connection in the roll out of the NBP.

Broadband Officers in each Local Authority were tasked with consulting with local com-

munities and business to find the appropriate mix of locations to reap the maximum benefits.

All BCPs will have a free public Wi-Fi connection, others will have hot-desks, and some will be digital hub business centres where digital training, business information events, and other SME supports are organised.

It is anticipated that there will be between 7 and 23 BCP locations identified in each county and they will include 138 community centres, 14 tourism locations, 51 schools and three business parks.

Work will commence on the deployment of the Broadband Connection Points immediately. It is expected that 298 Broadband Connection Points will be established and providing a high speed broadband service by the end of 2020.

By the end of 2021, NBI plans to pass approximately 115,000 premises, with 70,000 - 100,000 passed each year thereafter until rollout is completed. NBI has indicated that the network rollout will take an estimated 7 years from the beginning of deployment. A deployment plan will be made available by NBI shortly.

### **National Broadband Plan Data**

209. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the material change to the intervention area since the mapping exercise for the national broadband plan was completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49163/19]

210. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of premises added and removed, respectively, from the intervention area of the national broadband plan. [49164/19]

211. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the breakdown of premises removed from the intervention area by operator type (details supplied). [49165/19]

212. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the providers whose premises already passed from the intervention area of the national broadband plan. [49166/19]

213. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of operators whose data was accepted and not accepted, respectively, in respect of submissions made on the mapping consultation for the intervention area of the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49167/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 209 to 213, inclusive, together.

As a State intervention, the NBP must comply with the requirements of the European Commission's Guidelines on the application of State aid rules for broadband networks. The Guidelines require, amongst other things, that Member States carry out a detailed mapping exercise to identify as far as reasonably possible those areas where intervention is required.

Having consulted with industry on an ongoing basis, my Department recently conducted a final public consultation to close the mapping exercise in advance of the award of the NBP contract. Over 180 submissions were received from a variety of stakeholders, including 30 from large and small commercial telecommunications operators, with the remainder from local

authority broadband officers and members of the public.

The European Commission approved the NBP under state law and confirmed that the NBP target areas where no broadband infrastructure offering download speeds of at least 30MB/s is currently in place, and where no private investor has demonstrated a concrete plan to invest commercially in the near future.

Having evaluated the submissions received, approximately 38,000 premises were removed from the intervention area as commercial operators provided evidence that these premises can now access a high speed broadband service from an existing network. These premises relate to network deployment detailed in submissions received from eir (34,000 premises) regarding its fibre rural network and SIRO (4,000 premises) as part of its wider fibre network rollout, which were evaluated as meeting the assessment criteria published by the Department.

In addition, approximately 37,000 premises originally identified as being served by commercial operators have now been included in the intervention area for the NBP, as commercial operators' plans to serve these premises have not materialised.

The map has also been updated for approximately an additional 2,000 premises identified in the latest Ordnance Survey Ireland data. The final Intervention Area now covers 537,596 premises.

### **National Broadband Plan**

214. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a minimum number of premises in the national broadband plan intervention area was required. [49168/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** As a State intervention, the NBP must comply with the requirements of the European Commission's Guidelines on the application of State aid rules for broadband networks. The Guidelines require, amongst other things, that Member States carry out a detailed mapping exercise to identify as far as reasonably possible those areas where intervention is required.

Having consulted with industry on an ongoing basis, my Department recently conducted a final public consultation to close the mapping exercise for the intervention area in advance of the award of the NBP contract. The final intervention area now covers 537,596 premises. This was an important element in the State aid process and a positive State aid decision was received from the European Commission on 15 November.

### **National Broadband Plan**

215. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the circumstances under which encroachment by commercial operators onto the intervention area of the national broadband plan is deemed to have taken place; the mechanism by which his Department is notified of the intention to claim that encroachment has taken place; the method by which the contract signatory may claim the contingency set aside for this and whether this payment takes the form of a one-off payment. [49169/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department recently conducted a public consultation to close the ongoing mapping exercise, seeking submissions from operators who wish to have their existing high speed

broadband networks, or who have concrete plans to invest in high speed broadband networks over the next 7 years, to be included on the Department's High Speed Broadband Map. That consultation was extended twice at the request of operators, resulting in a total nine week period for submissions and it closed on 30th September 2019. The updated Intervention Area proposed now represents 537,596 premises in the State.

The NBP contract provides a mechanism for National Broadband Ireland (NBI) to apply for compensation for encroachment where other commercial operators have deployed a future proofed high speed broadband service in advance of NBI's own deployment in the intervention area.

This subsidy is capped and can only be applied for where my Department determines a commercial deployment of high speed broadband meets the requirements set out in the NBP contract, specifically a deployment of a fibre or equivalent high speed broadband technology, and that this deployment has had a negative impact on NBI's business case. The mapping consultation, which has confirmed the intervention area, has reduced the risk of this element of contingency subsidy being required.

### **Energy Schemes**

216. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the details of the various home energy grants that are available to persons building an eco-friendly timber frame home on their site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49193/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department funds a number of energy efficiency grant schemes that are administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI). The aim of these schemes is to improve the energy efficiency of our built environment, in a way which represents the best possible use of Exchequer funding.

As new homes are already required to meet specific energy performance standards and to incorporate renewables under Building Regulations, grant support is currently focussed on improving the condition of existing dwellings. In light of the above, the SEAI does not provide grant support for new-build homes.

### **Renewable Energy Generation**

217. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the timeframe for the publication of guidelines pertaining to the supply of energy to the national grid through solar energy and solar farms in County Wicklow; the terms and conditions which prospective suppliers must adhere to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49196/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** In order to deliver on the ambition set out in the Climate Action Plan, my Department is developing the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS). The RESS has been designed within a competitive auction-based, cost effective framework and the scheme will provide for a renewable electricity (RES-E) ambition of 70% by 2030. The Scheme is subject to state aid approval from the EU Commission.

The Climate Action Plan targets the delivery of indicative volumes of up to 1.5 GW of grid scale solar by 2030. Utility scale solar energy farms will be critical to diversifying the renewable technology mix and to deliver gains through connecting hybrid renewable technologies. The volume of connected solar in 2030 may well exceed this target if prices continue to fall and solar projects are successful in the RESS auctions.

The terms and conditions of the first RESS auction (RESS-1) will set out the process by which all competing technologies including solar farms receive support for supplying energy to the national grid.

My Department held a public stakeholder briefing on 22 November 2019 at which officials presented on the RESS detailed design framework, and the presentation from the briefing session is available on my Department's website. It is expected that the draft RESS 1 terms and conditions will be published in December 2019, subject to Government approval.

### **Warmer Homes Scheme**

218. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated full-year cost of extending the warmer homes scheme to replacing single glaze windows; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49225/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Better Energy Warmer Homes Scheme provides energy efficiency upgrades to the homes of people living in or at risk of energy poverty. The Scheme is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) on behalf of my Department. These upgrades are provided free of charge to the homeowner. This year the total allocation for the scheme is €39.8 million.

Under the existing scheme, window upgrades can be provided in certain circumstances following an SEAI technical survey. This recommendation is typically made in circumstances where only single glaze windows exist and where wall insulation is also being installed. Recommendations are made on a case by case basis.

### **Better Energy Homes Scheme**

219. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated full-year cost of extending the better energy homes scheme to provide universal attic insulation and universal wall insulation in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49226/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Existing grants under the Better Energy Homes Scheme are fixed amounts that are expected to cover approximately 30% of the total cost to the homeowner of the insulation being installed. However, the cost of insulating homes can vary significantly from property to property. Key factors which determine the cost include the type of insulation required, the size of the property and whether there is any existing insulation to be upgraded.

If the existing grant was increased to meet 100% of the cost, it is estimated that the additional full-year (2018) costs would have been approximately €20 million, solely based on the grants paid for attic and wall insulation in 2018. However, it would be expected that actual costs of the proposal would be significantly higher due to increased demand arising from the provi-

sion of a 100% grant instead of a 30% grant.

The Government's Climate Action Plan sets an ambitious target of 500,000 home retrofits to Building Energy Rating 'B2' by 2030. I recently announced the establishment of a Retrofit Taskforce that will drive the achievement of this commitment and develop a new national delivery model, which will group homes together, create easy pay back mechanisms and support smart financing.

### **Recycling Policy**

220. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the estimated full-year cost of a new recycling centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49227/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Waste management planning, including with infrastructure provision and associated costs, is the responsibility of local authorities under Part II of the Waste Management Act, 1996 (as amended). I have no function in the matter.

### **Departmental Schemes**

221. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the cost of the warmth and well-being pilot scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49228/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Warmth & Wellbeing Pilot Scheme is a joint policy initiative between my Department and the Department of Health under the Government's Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty and the Healthy Ireland Framework. The main aim of the Scheme is to validate, in an Irish context, the strong international evidence that making homes warmer, drier and more energy efficient can have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of people living with chronic respiratory conditions.

Since 2016, approximately €26.3 million has been invested under the Scheme in upgrading over 1,200 homes in the pilot areas of Dublin 8, 10, 12, 22 and 24.

The process of evaluating the Scheme is on-going and is being overseen by a Steering Group comprised of my Department, the Department of Health, SEAI and HSE. Initial reports from the HSE have indicated that the upgrades are delivering benefits to the health and wellbeing of participants. An initial review of the energy impacts of the scheme has shown that the average Building Energy Rating of participating homes improved from a D2 to a B3 with carbon emissions reducing by on average 2.2 tCO<sub>2</sub>/year.

It is expected that an interim report on the health impacts of the scheme, which is being undertaken by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, will be completed in the coming months with the final evaluation scheduled for completion in 2021. A process for determining the next steps for the Scheme is nearing completion.

### **Broadcasting Sector**

222. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount of public funding from his Department given to each of the directly funded licensed television and radio stations broadcasting here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49229/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** RTÉ and TG4 are the only broadcasters that receive public funding directly from my Department.

RTÉ receives its public funding from TV Licence Fee receipts, which includes a contribution from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in respect of free TV licences. Total licence fee funding for RTE in 2019 has not yet been determined as the final amount is contingent on licence fee sales to the public to year end. In 2018, RTE's licence fee receipts amounted to €188.5m.

In 2019, TG4 received all its public funding from the exchequer, which amounts to €34.233m current and €2m capital funding.

My Department also pays 7% of net licence fee receipts to the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland for the administration of the Broadcasting Fund. This fund is used for the Sound and Vision and Archiving Schemes which are open to all broadcasters. Details of funding provided under these schemes is published on the BAI website at [www.bai.ie/en/broadcasting/funding-development-3/](http://www.bai.ie/en/broadcasting/funding-development-3/).

### Legislative Measures

223. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when he plans to move the Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill 2019 to Committee Stage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49230/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Broadcasting Amendment Bill 2019 provides for:

- the part funding of the BAI through TV licence receipts so as to reduce the levy burden on broadcasters,
- the creation of a new funding scheme that would allow the granting of bursaries to journalists in local or community radio stations,
- the BAI to retain part of the levy to fund its working capital requirements and allows them the scope to determine exemptions and deferrals to the levy.

In addition, I have received Government approval to bring an amendment at Committee stage that will allow TV licence collection to be put out to public tender. I intend to seek Government approval for the drafting of this Head before year end, with a view to introducing the necessary amendment at Committee stage early in the New Year.

### Broadband Service Provision

224. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number and percentage of households and commercial premises that have access to fibre optic broadband in areas (details supplied); and if he will make a statement

on the matter. [49274/19]

225. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the proportion of the remaining household and commercial premises that have fibre optic broadband to the premises itself, excluding districts to be enabled by the national broadband plan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49275/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 224 and 225 together.

Premises where commercial providers are not currently delivering or have indicated no plans to deliver high speed broadband services will be addressed through the National Broadband Plan (NBP) State led Intervention.

There is a total of 1,838,932 premises outside the NBP Intervention Area that already have access to high speed broadband.

I attach a table that sets out the number and percentage of premises to be covered through the State Intervention (Amber area) and through commercial investment (Blue area) in the counties identified by the Deputy. The table contains my Department's most up to date statistics, which are for Q3 2019.

Information on the specific towns referred to by the Deputy are available on the High Speed Broadband Map on my Department's website, [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie).

The Blue area is where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services. The NBP defines high speed broadband as delivering a minimum speed of 30Mbps download and 6Mbps upload in a reliable, high quality and consistent manner. Premises in the Blue area may access a high speed broadband service via various platforms including fibre, many exceeding the definition of high speed broadband.

As the Deputy will be aware, the telecoms market is fully liberalised and regulated by the Commission for Communications Regulation, ComReg. The regulator publishes a quarterly report which highlights trends in the telecommunications industry. This includes the number of subscriptions in Ireland to high speed broadband services by speed (e.g. download speeds of 30 megabits per second) and by platform (fibre, cable, VDSL etc.). The latest report can be found at <https://www.comreg.ie/publication/quarterly-key-data-report-q2-2019>.

Very high speeds are increasingly available across all fixed broadband platforms. Per the ComReg report approximately 79.6% of broadband subscriptions were  $\geq 30$ Mbps (with 33.1%  $\geq 100$ Mbps). This equates to approximately 81.5% (with 35.4%  $\geq 100$ Mbps) of residential subscriptions and 64.0% (with 14.6%  $\geq 100$ Mbps) of business subscriptions.

County	Premises within the NBP Intervention Area	Premises within Commercial Operator's Area	Premises within planned rural deployment	Amber %	Blue %	Light Blue %	Total
Dublin	12,145	597,112	203	2	98	0	609,460
Louth	8,245	53,085	226	13	86	1	61,556
Meath	18,989	67,609	396	22	78	0	86,994
Kildare	13,329	79,837	260	14	85	1	93,426
Wicklow	14,871	50,415	144	23	77	0	65,430
Cork	78,695	190,231	2,279	29	70	1	271,205
Limerick	21,024	76,019	844	21	78	1	97,887

County	Premises within the NBP Intervention-Area	Premises within Commercial Operator's Area	Premises within planned rural deployment	Amber %	Blue %	Light Blue %	Total
Waterford	14,876	47,028	86	26	74	0	61,990
Galway	38,338	95,951	1,444	28	71	1	135,733
Sligo	14,809	25,143	187	37	63	0	40,139
Kilkenny	18,092	29,973	90	38	62	0	48,155

### National Broadband Plan Data

226. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the cost in each year of the national broadband plan since the signing of the contract in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49280/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The maximum cost of the contract to deliver the National Broadband Plan, signed on 19th November, is €2.977 billion over 25 years. This includes €480 million for contingency costs and €354 million in VAT.

My Department has a capital allocation in 2020 for the National Broadband Plan of €119 million. The multi-annual expenditure ceilings for Capital Expenditure for my Department are published in the Budget 2020 Expenditure Report. The total capital expenditure ceiling for my Department for 2021 is €517 million and for 2022 is €611 million.

The detailed allocations required for the NBP for 2021 and for subsequent years of the NBP will be settled in the context of the annual Estimates process.

### Broadband Service Provision

227. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on an issue (details supplied) which is affecting a rural part of County Waterford; the way in which this issue will be addressed in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49288/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The National Broadband Plan (NBP) is the Government's plan to rollout high speed broadband to the 1.1 million people living and working in the nearly 540,000 premises including almost 100,000 businesses and farms, along with 695 schools where commercial operators will not commit to deliver the service.

The Deputy's Question relates to a premises which is located in the AMBER area on NBP High Speed Broadband Map, which is available on my Department's website at [www.broadband.gov.ie](http://www.broadband.gov.ie). The AMBER area represents the area to be served by the network to be deployed under the NBP State led Intervention, the contract for which was signed on 19 November with National Broadband Ireland (NBI).

Work has already begun and a deployment plan will be made available by NBI shortly. All counties will see premises passed in the first 2 years and over 90% of premises in the State will have access to high speed broadband within the next four years.

Approximately 300 Broadband Connections Points (BCPs), including schools, library hubs and local sports halls in every county in Ireland, will be connected to high speed broadband during 2020, to enable communities to quickly get free public access to high speed broadband. The BCP locations are available to view on the High Speed Broadband Map on the Department's website [www.dccae.gov.ie](http://www.dccae.gov.ie).

By the end of 2021, NBI plans to pass approximately 115,000 premises, with 70,000 - 100,000 passed each year thereafter until rollout is completed. NBI has indicated that the network rollout will take an estimated 7 years from the beginning of deployment.

With regard to the Eircode query raised by the Deputy, Eircodes are assigned to new property addresses using a valid postal address and verified geo-locations. An Post collects information on new and existing buildings, as well as changes to existing addresses and Ordnance Survey Ireland provides the geo-locations for these buildings. An Post GeoDirectory issue a new release of the GeoDirectory database file on a quarterly basis to Capita Business Support Services Ireland, trading as Eircode, in accordance with their licence agreement.

Residents who have queries relating to Eircodes can contact Eircode by phone on 0818 300 005, email [hello@eircode.ie](mailto:hello@eircode.ie) or by post to Capita Business Support Services Ireland Ltd, Unit B, West Cork Business and Technology Park, Clonakilty, Co. Cork, P85 YH98.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

228. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the number of agency staff hired and-or engaged by his Department in the past five years to date; the cost per year of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49292/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My Department does not employ agency staff.

### **National Broadband Plan Implementation**

229. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a hub (details supplied) will be prioritised to go live with high-speed broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49327/19]

230. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a hub (details supplied) will be prioritised to go live with high-speed broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49328/19]

231. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if a hub (details supplied) will be prioritised to go live with high-speed broadband; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49329/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 229 to 231, inclusive, together.

The Government recognises the need to roll out high speed broadband as quickly as possible and is conscious that the full rollout of the National Broadband Plan (NBP) State intervention area will take a number of years.

Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) are NBP locations of community importance across Ireland such as community centres, parish halls and schools.

Approximately 300 BCPs will receive an early connection in the roll out of the NBP.

I confirm that each of the locations mentioned in the Deputy's questions are included as BCPs.

The BCPs have been specifically selected by the local authorities so that they can provide public Wi-Fi and other facilities to support mini digital/enterprise hubs to the local community in advance of the main NBP deployment.

Broadband Officers in each Local Authority were tasked with consulting with local communities and business to find the appropriate mix of locations to reap the maximum benefits.

All BCPs will have a free public Wi-Fi connection, others will have hot-desks, and some will be digital hub business centres where digital training, business information events, and other SME supports are organised.

It is anticipated that there will be between 7 and 23 BCP locations identified in each county and they will include 138 community centres, 14 tourism locations, 51 schools and three business parks.

Work will commence on the deployment of the BCPs immediately. It is expected that 298 Broadband Connection Points will be established and providing a high speed broadband service by the end of 2020.

## Waste Data

232. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the percentage of plastic waste recycled here; his plans to increase awareness regarding the amount recycled instead of general waste; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49330/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The EPA is the competent authority for the collation of national waste statistics and reports annually on Ireland's performance against the recycling and recovery targets set out in the EU Packaging and Waste Packaging Directive. In 2017 Ireland surpassed the material specific target of 22.5% for plastics and achieved a recycling rate of 34%.

While I do not have a percentage figure for plastic waste recycled in Ireland, I understand from Repak, the national packaging compliance scheme, that in respect of their membership, approximately 15% of the plastic packaging collected in Ireland is recycled here while the remainder is exported to the UK and Europe.

We are determined to increase recycling of plastics from 34% to 55% in the coming years and, along with other EU member states, to phase out non-recyclable plastics entirely.

Increasing public awareness to improve recycle quality through better recycling practices and reduced contamination of waste continues to be a priority for my Department. In this regard my Department is committed to the continued promotion of [www.mywaste.ie](http://www.mywaste.ie). This web portal which was launched in November 2018 has been developed by the Regional Waste Management Offices with support from the Department, to provide consumers with a single information resource on all aspects of domestic waste management in Ireland and in particular it focuses on

the provision of advice on managing waste more responsibly and efficiently.

To ensure a consistent national message on improving waste management, the Department established a Waste Communications Strategy Group in 2018 consisting of the Department, the Environmental Protection Agency, Repak, the Price Monitoring Group on Household Waste Collection and the Regional Waste Management Planning Offices. This Group continues to meet to help ensure the various bodies involved in waste awareness campaigns co-ordinate to the fullest extent possible.

A full public consultation on the development of Ireland's Waste Action Plan will be launched before the end of this year which will seek views on all matters waste related, including seeking views on increasing the rate of plastic recycling and the need for and delivery of future awareness and education campaigns.

### **Wind Energy Generation**

233. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress towards achieving the interim offshore wind energy targets set out in the climate action plan 2019 for 2025. [49331/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The Climate Action Plan includes, inter alia, a suite of actions to decarbonise the electricity sector and boost the quantity of renewable generation in order to meet our target of 70% of demand from renewable sources by 2030; the Plan commits to connecting at least 3.5GW of Offshore Wind by 2030.

In order to achieve this my Department is working closely with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government on the development of a new, streamlined consenting regime for offshore renewable energy which will modernise and streamline the marine development management and enforcements systems. This new regime will replace existing State and development consent regimes and streamline arrangements on the basis of a single consent principle.

My Department have also established a working group on the Framework for Offshore Electricity Grid. This group will assess the options available for a suitable offshore grid model for Ireland allowing us to develop an offshore grid model informed by and aligned to Government Policy such as the forthcoming National Marine Planning Framework.

To support the delivery of the national ambition to further decrease our dependence on foreign fossil fuels my Department is also developing a new Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) which will assist Ireland in meeting its renewable energy contributions out to 2030 by providing supports to a range of technologies including offshore wind projects.

### **Public Service Obligation Levy**

234. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to repurpose the public service obligation levy to support rehabilitation of peatlands; if he will be consulting on the calculation and implementation of the levy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49347/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** My officials have been engaging with the European Commission to explore the potential for a support scheme, funded through a Public Service Obligation, for the enhanced re-

habilitation of Bord na Móna bogs used to harvest peat for electricity generation over and above what Bord na Móna is obliged to do under its EPA licences. A formal pre-notification proposal will be submitted through the Commission's State Aid notification structure shortly.

The relevant rules relating to consultation, whether set out in national or EU law, will be complied with. The verified cost of the enhanced rehabilitation of the peatlands will determine the overall amount of the levy under the Public Service Obligation.

It is expected that about 200 Bord na Mona employees could be engaged in this rehabilitation and restoration work.

### Legislative Programme

235. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the climate action (amendment) Bill will be brought to Dáil Éireann; if he will report on the introduction of a net zero target, development of carbon budgets, preparation of a national long-term strategy and the establishment of an enhanced Climate Change Advisory Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49348/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** On 17 June 2019, the Government published the Climate Action Plan 2019, which commits, inter alia, to bringing forward a new Climate Action (Amendment) Bill to amend the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015.

The objective of the Bill is to significantly strengthen the statutory framework for governance of the climate challenge, and ensure delivery of successive Climate Action Plans and Long-term Climate Strategies, supported by a system of carbon budgeting and sectoral targets with appropriate oversight by Government, the Oireachtas and a new Climate Action Council. The Climate Action Plan identifies a number of provisions to be incorporated in the new Bill including:

- Establishing the 2050 target in law
- Making the adoption of carbon budgets a legal requirement
- Requiring the Government to set a decarbonisation target range for each sector, with the Minister with primary responsibility for each sector identified as being accountable for delivering the relevant actions to meet the sectoral targets
- Establishing the Climate Action Council as a successor organisation to the Climate Change Advisory Council
- Establishing that the Climate Action Plan shall be updated annually
- Establishing that a Long-Term Climate Strategy, to match the period covered by the three five-year carbon budgets, shall be published
- Ensuring that the proposed governance arrangements retain sufficient flexibility to allow necessary reorientation of policy in the light of changing technologies, circumstances, challenges and opportunities over the period to 2030 and beyond.

The General Scheme is currently being prepared on the basis of the provisions outlined above with a view to publication of the Climate Action (Amendment) Bill in quarter 1, 2020 as committed to under the Plan.

In parallel to work on the Climate Action (Amendment) Bill 2019, my Department is also in the process of preparing Ireland's Long-Term Strategy to meet the requirements set out under Article 15 Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action. This strategy will have a perspective of at least 30 years and shall include a range of emission reduction pathways to further illuminate, in each of our key sectors, what changes will be required.

Alongside the Bill and Long Term Strategy, the Climate Action Plan commits to evaluating in detail the changes required to adopt a more ambitious commitment of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, as part of finalising Ireland's long-term climate strategy. A public consultation has been launched on the Long Term Strategy by my Department. Further details are available on my Department's website.

### **Energy Policy Review**

**236. Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the steps being taken to ensure that the review of the security and sustainability of the energy supply here, with input from State-owned companies, is independent; the actions he will take to ensure potential conflicts of interest in his assessment of optimal actions, fossil fuels and technologies are avoided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49349/19]

**237. Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the State agencies that have a statutory or regulatory function regarding energy security; the agencies and bodies that have an advisory role on energy security; the way in which he will ensure that the regulatory aspects of energy security are not captured by stakeholder bodies such as the ESB and a company (details supplied) that may have strategic commercial interests at stake; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49420/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 236 and 237 together.

I have overall responsibility for national policy in the energy sector. This includes policy in relation to energy security, which is fully aligned with EU law and EU policy objectives. The Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU) has statutory functions relating to energy security, for both gas and electricity, and is independent in the exercise of its functions. These include functions in the Electricity Regulation Act, 1999, as amended, to promote the continuity, security and quality of supplies of electricity. CRU also is required by S.I. 60/2005 to monitor, and take such measures as it considers necessary to protect, the security of supply of electricity. In relation to gas, the CRU also has a statutory function to secure the continuity, security and quality of supplies of natural gas. The CRU is also the designated competent authority for Ireland, for EU Regulation 2017/1938 concerning measures to safeguard the security of supply of gas.

The National Oil Reserves Agency has statutory responsibility in relation to the storage of oil stocks for use in an emergency, at a level sufficient to comply with the State's stockholding obligations.

The transmission system operators for gas and electricity, Gas Networks Ireland and Eir-Grid, have legal responsibilities in relation to gas and electricity security. The electricity transmission system operators are responsible for, inter alia, ensuring the long-term ability of the system to meet reasonable demands for the transmission of electricity, and contributing to security of supply through adequate transmission capacity and system reliability. The gas transmission system operators are required, inter alia, to operate, maintain and develop under economic

conditions secure, reliable and efficient transmission facilities to secure an open market, with due regard to the environment.

My Department regularly engages with State Agencies and other stakeholders, including Gas Networks Ireland and the ESB, as part of the normal process of feeding into policy development and formulation.

In relation to energy sustainability and security, I am initiating a major review into Ireland's energy sustainability and security which will:

- Consider the optimal actions that need to be taken, in reaching 70% renewable electricity, to ensure Ireland's electricity system is backed up in a secure, safe and sustainable way.

- Assess the role of gas during the transition, as the lowest CO2 emitting fossil fuel, and consider how and from where it is sourced.

- Review the role that other technologies can play in the transition, including battery storage, pumped storage, the role of interconnection (both gas and electricity) and the possibilities for hydrogen and Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS).

- Consider what the roadmap for renewable electricity looks like in the period from 2030 to achieving carbon neutrality in 2050

The review that I have initiated into Ireland's energy security and sustainability will be carried out by an independent body following a public procurement exercise. In advance of commissioning the review,

I have written to the Chairperson of EirGrid, ESB, Bord na Móna, Ervia and CRU to seek their views on the challenges involved in making the transition to a carbon neutral economy.

### **Climate Change Adaptation Plans**

238. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the way in which his Department will ensure that there is no double counting of carbon sequestered under land use, land use change, forestry via afforestation, peatland restoration and rehabilitation and other projects that are planned to generate carbon credits by Bord na Móna, Coillte and other landowners; the methodologies for carbon sequestration on State lands which will be utilised; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49421/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** The State's obligations to report greenhouse gas emissions and greenhouse gas removals in the land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) sectors are set out under Regulation 525/2013, while accounting obligations are set out in Directive 529/2013 up to 2020 and Regulation 2018/841 ("the LULUCF Regulation") for the period 2021-2030. These relate to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the associated Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement. The LULUCF Regulation includes an alignment of land use categories with those reported to the UNFCCC and brings the LULUCF sector into the European Union's 2030 climate policy framework more directly by including a link between the Effort Sharing Regulation (Regulation 2018/842) and land use accounting. This Regulation forms parts of the implementation of the European Union's commitments under the Paris Agreement.

Due to certain specificities and the complex nature of this sector, the LULUCF sector is treated differently to other sectors under the European Union's climate framework policy. The

LULUCF Regulation requires Member States to ensure that accounted emissions from land use are entirely compensated by equivalent accounted removals from the atmosphere through action in the sector, i.e. to ensure that there are no net accounted emissions from those sectors. This obligation covers all managed land use categories in the territory of Ireland and requires the State to account for emissions and removals from both State-owned land and privately-owned land, including forests. Ireland and other EU Member States may employ a capped amount of total accounted removals, in excess of the no net emissions obligation, to meet targets under the Effort Sharing Regulation. It is also possible for Member States to use annual emissions allocations under the Effort Sharing Regulation to meet their obligations under the LULUCF Regulation.

Ireland's National Inventory Report, prepared by the Environmental Protection Agency, details the methodologies followed in developing estimates of emission and removals for LULUCF. The latest report can be found here: <http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/air/airemissions/ghg/nir2019/>.

A carbon credit generally refers to an accounting unit in an international agreement or a regulatory or voluntary market and does not refer to a universally traded asset. There is no inherent private property right to greenhouse gas emissions or removals by forests or other land uses, whether on lands held by the State or privately owned. The State supports the long-term greenhouse gas store in the forest estate through regulation and financial incentives for forest planting and sustainable management, such as the afforestation grant and premium scheme. Land owners may choose to pursue voluntary initiatives outside of such subsidies that do not impact on the State's reporting and accounting obligations.

### **Public Transport Data**

239. **Deputy David Cullinane** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of passengers carried by each form of transport (details supplied); the amount in tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions produced by each of the forms of transport in each of the years from 2008 to the most recent year for which figures are available in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49224/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The information requested by the Deputy is currently being collated by my Department and will be forwarded to the Deputy within 10 working days.

### **Public Transport Fares**

240. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the services which will be available to use contactless payments on public transport; and when they will be introduced in County Cork. [49191/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport in Ireland. I am not involved in the day-to-day operations of public transport.

The issue raised is a matter for the National Transport Authority (NTA), in conjunction with the public transport providers, and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

## Bus Services

241. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will allocate funding for a bus shelter in Buttevant, County Cork. [49215/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the development and provision of bus stops and bus shelters throughout the State.

Noting their responsibility in relation to this matter, I have forwarded your query to the NTA for their consideration and direct reply. Please notify my office if you have not received a reply within 10 working days.

## Sports Capital Programme Data

242. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details on each application sent from County Wicklow for the sports capital grant 2019, by successful, unsuccessful and incomplete applications. [49217/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** Details of all applications submitted under the latest round (2018) of the Sports Capital Programme are listed on a county basis on my Department's website at <https://assets.gov.ie/20000/ececa538f64a48e3ab4540515da4cf95.pdf>.

Similarly, details of all allocations under the programme are also published on the Department's website at <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/471ed5-sports-capital-allocations/>

In relation to the latest allocations under the Programme as announced earlier this month, my Department will shortly be in contact with all applicants with full details of the outcome of the assessment process. All unsuccessful applicants will be invited to appeal the Department's decision if they believe that their application was not correctly assessed according to the published assessment manual.

## Sports Capital Programme Data

243. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of clubs and organisations in Waterford city and county that were unsuccessful in their application for funding under the sports capital grant scheme; the number that failed to meet the criteria; the main reason unsuccessful applicants in Waterford city and county were declined; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49242/19]

246. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of applications received under the sports capital grant programme for 2019 from clubs and organisations in Waterford city and county; the amount applied for by such clubs and organisations; the amount approved and declined, respectively, for such clubs and organisations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49245/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 243 and 246 together.

Details of all applications submitted under the latest round (2018) of the Sports Capital Programme are listed on a county basis on my Department's website at <https://assets.gov.ie/20000/>

eecca538f64a48e3ab4540515da4cf95.pdf.

Similarly, details of all allocations under the programme are also published on the Department's website at <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/471ed5-sports-capital-allocations/>

In relation to the latest allocations under the Programme which were announced earlier this month, the bottom 25% by score in each county did not receive a grant offer.

For the first time under this latest round, all applicants were given a chance to correct their application during the assessment period. This helped ensure that the level of invalid applications was reduced to 9% which was significantly lower than any previous round of the Programme. The main reason for invalid applications was applicants failing to provide evidence of ownership of the property/land they proposed to develop.

In relation to the latest allocations, my Department will shortly be in contact with all applicants with full details of the outcome of the assessment process. All unsuccessful applicants will be invited to appeal the Department's decision if they believe that their application was not correctly assessed according to the published assessment manual.

### **Sports Capital Programme Administration**

244. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if a second round of funding under the sports capital grant programme will become available; if so, when the funds may become available; the closing date for additional information and submissions which need to be supplied by clubs and organisations that were unsuccessful in the most recent allocations under the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49243/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on Friday 19th October 2018. By the closing date, 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding. This was the highest number of applications ever received. 186 of these applications were for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that subsequently submitted corrected documents. These applications were assessed first and approximately €7m in allocations to 170 projects were announced on the 17th January. 619 "equipment only" applications were assessed next and 466 allocations with a value of €9.8m were announced to these organisations in May. All unsuccessful "equipment only" applicants were given the opportunity to appeal the decision. The final allocations for capital works were announced earlier this month with a total of €39.5m allocated to 1,009 projects.

In relation to these latest allocations, my Department will shortly be in contact with all of these applicants with full details of the outcome of the assessment process. All unsuccessful applicants will be invited to appeal the Department's decision if they believe that their application was not correctly assessed according to the published assessment manual.

My Department is also preparing a review of all aspects of the operation of the 2018 SCP and this review will include consideration of the timing and scale of the next round of the SCP. It is anticipated that the next round of the Programme will be open for applications in the coming months.

### **Sports Capital Programme Data**

245. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the num-

ber of applications nationally received under the sports capital grant programme for 2019; the amount applied for; the profile of applications in terms of sporting discipline; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49244/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** The most recent round of the Sports Capital Programme was the 2018 round. 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding. The breakdown of applications by sport (as categorised by the Department's online application system) is set out in the table.

Sports	Number of applications	Total Amount Sought
American Football	5	€51,345
Angling/Fishing	6	€159,885
Archery	8	€78,534
Athletics	65	€4,633,604
Badminton	4	€104,410
Basketball	18	€671,841
Billiards & Snooker	4	€140,457
Bowls	10	€132,417
Boxing	62	€1,857,099
Camogie	20	€866,494
Canoeing / Kayaking	30	€839,499
Clay Pigeon Shooting	3	€97,255
Community Games	15	€652,499
Cricket	23	€968,259
Cycling	19	€639,332
Diving/Snorkelling	22	€1,017,582
Equestrian Sports	25	€839,157
Fencing	2	€60,856
Gaelic Games	673	€57,559,817
Golf	146	€12,522,253
Gymnastics	21	€861,064
Handball	17	€965,370
Hillwalking	14	€279,879
Hockey	36	€1,884,352
Ice Hockey	2	€69,060
Judo	3	€69,048
Ladies Gaelic Football	7	€211,653
Martial Arts	11	€176,296
Motor Sport	1	€120,775
Motorcycling	3	€94,116
Mountaineering	4	€156,246
Multi-sport	378	€29,095,561
Olympic Handball	1	€24,830
Orienteering	1	€8,200
Pitch and Putt	20	€521,386
Raquetball	1	€150,000
Rock Climbing	1	€10,430
Rowing	72	€3,471,153
Rugby	88	€8,128,700

*Questions - Written Answers*

Sports	Number of applications	Total Amount Sought
Sailing	33	€2,446,184
Shooting Sports	1	€8,100
Skateboarding	2	€192,316
Soccer	302	€20,833,293
Squash	5	€303,511
Surfing	2	€48,000
Swimming	40	€1,087,704
Table Tennis	2	€12,830
Taekwondo	2	€19,614
Tennis	70	€5,895,639
Tenpin bowling	1	€15,500
Triathlon	17	€146,461
Tug of War	1	€20,000
Volleyball	12	€97,125
Waterskiing & Wakeboarding	1	€49,600
Weightlifting	4	€139,952
Wheelchair Sport	1	€274,173
Grand Total	2337	€161,780,716

*Question No. 246 answered with Question No. 243.*

### **Road Projects Expenditure**

247. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if there has been a significant reduction in the spending of the 2019 national roads allocations by TII in conjunction with the local authorities nationwide; if so, the reason for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49246/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and securing capital funding in relation to the national roads programme. Once funding arrangements have been put in place with Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 and in the context of Project Ireland 2040, the planning, design, and construction, including the distribution of funding for individual national roads, is a matter for TII, in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Road Projects Expenditure**

248. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason Limerick City and County Council has only spent €655,000 out of €7,153,000 of its 2019 allocations to date in 2019 for the improvement of national roads; if the underspend is linked to the funding of the national children's hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49247/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Trans-

port, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and securing appropriate capital funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 and in the context of delivering the Government's commitments arising out of Project Ireland 2040, the planning, design, construction and improvement, including the distribution of funding for individual national roads, is a matter for TII, in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

249. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason an application for sports capital grant funding by a centre (details supplied) was unsuccessful; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49249/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** 2,337 applications were submitted under the 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme seeking a total of €162m in funding.

While the club referred to by the Deputy submitted a valid application, due to the level of demand and the amount of funding available, unfortunately it was not possible to allocate grants to every eligible applicant under this round.

My Department will be writing to all applicants in the coming days with details of the outcome of the assessment of their application. All unsuccessful applicants will be invited to appeal the decision if they believe the Department has made an error in assessing their application in accordance with the published assessment manual.

### **Search and Rescue Service Provision**

250. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the voluntary river rescue in view of the fact that the Coast Guard has been stood down; if the river rescue will now be the first port of call of An Garda Síochána in the event of a marine casualty situation or emergency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49259/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Under the National Search and Rescue Plan, An Garda Síochána (AGS) has responsibility for Search and Rescue Operations on inland rivers and lakes and tasking the Search and Rescue Units they have available to them. Where Coast Guard boats are stationed on or near Rivers they respond to incidents on the river when requested by the AGS through the Marine Resce Coordination Centre. These assets are currently unavailable to the AGS. The RNLI have two stations on the Shannon in Lough Ree and Lough Derg which are coordinated by the Coast Guard for inland waterways Search and Rescues missions on the Shannon.

### **Road Projects Expenditure**

251. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the underspend of the national road maintenance budget which has led to a national surplus of 39.7% and an average surplus per local authority of €2,334,691.70 according to TII data and detailed industry analysis (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on

the matter. [49282/19]

252. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the position regarding the underspend of the road maintenance budget for County Kilkenny which has led to a situation in which 90.8% or €3,678,420 of the annual budget has been left unspent as of 31 October 2019 (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49283/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 251 and 252 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and securing capital funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015 the planning, design, and construction, including the distribution and management of funding for national roads, is a matter for TII in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

253. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of agency staff hired and-or engaged by his Department in the past five years to date; the cost per year of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49305/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The information requested by the Deputy is being assessed by my officials and will be forwarded to the Deputy within 10 working days.

### **Sports Capital Programme**

254. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the next round of sports capital funding will be opened. [49356/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme (SCP) closed for applications on Friday 19th October 2018. By the closing date, 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding. This was the highest number of applications ever received. 186 of these applications were for projects deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that subsequently submitted corrected documents. These applications were assessed first and approximately €7m in allocations to 170 projects were announced on the 17th January. 619 “equipment only” applications were assessed next and 466 allocations with a value of €9.8m were announced to these organisations in May. The final allocations for capital works were announced earlier this month with a total of €39.5m allocated to 1,009 projects.

In relation to these latest allocations, my Department will shortly be in contact with all of these applicants with full details of the outcome of the assessment process. All unsuccessful applicants will be invited to appeal the Department’s decision if they believe their application was not correctly assessed in accordance with the published assessment manual. My Department will also undertake a full review of all aspects of the 2018 SCP. Part of the review will include consideration of the timing and scale of the next round of the Programme but I expect that the SCP will be open for applications again in the coming months.

### Sports Capital Programme Administration

255. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the details of the appeals system available for unsuccessful applicants under the 2018 sports capital programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49399/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on Friday 19th October 2018. By the closing date, 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding. This was the highest number of applications ever received. 186 of these applications were for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that subsequently submitted corrected documents. These applications were assessed first and approximately €7m in allocations to 170 projects were announced on the 17th January. 619 “equipment only” applications were assessed next and 466 allocations with a value of €9.8m were announced to these organisations in May. All unsuccessful “equipment only” applicants were given the opportunity to appeal the decision. The final allocations for capital works were announced earlier this month with a total of €39.5m allocated to 1,009 projects.

In relation to these latest allocations, my Department will shortly be in contact with all of these applicants with full details of the outcome of the assessment process. All unsuccessful applicants will be invited to appeal the Department’s decision if they believe that their application was not correctly assessed according to the published assessment manual.

### Sports Capital Programme Data

256. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of successful and unsuccessful applicants, respectively by sports in the context of the latest sports capital grants; the number of grant appeals; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49441/19]

The information sought by the Deputy in relation to the 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme is set out in the following table.

Sports	Number of applications	Number of grants
American Football	5	3
Angling/Fishing	6	4
Archery	8	7
Athletics	65	51
Badminton	4	2
Basketball	18	15
Billiards & Snooker	4	3
Bowls	10	9
Boxing	62	50
Camogie	20	16
Canoeing / Kayaking	30	25
Clay Pigeon Shooting	3	2
Community Games	15	14
Cricket	23	16
Cycling	19	15

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Sports	Number of applications	Number of grants
Diving/Snorkelling	22	12
Equestrian Sports	25	19
Fencing	2	1
Gaelic Games	673	490
Golf	146	95
Gymnastics	21	14
Handball	17	12
Hillwalking	14	13
Hockey	36	23
Ice Hockey	2	2
Judo	3	2
Ladies Gaelic Football	7	5
Martial Arts	11	7
Motor Sport	1	1
Motorcycling	3	2
Mountaineering	4	2
Multi-sport	378	269
Olympic Handball	1	
Orienteering	1	1
Pitch and Putt	20	13
Raquetball	1	1
Rock Climbing	1	1
Rowing	72	47
Rugby	88	56
Sailing	33	16
Shooting Sports	1	1
Skateboarding	2	2
Soccer	302	198
Squash	5	3
Surfing	2	1
Swimming	40	29
Table Tennis	2	2
Taekwondo	2	0
Tennis	70	48
Tenpin bowling	1	1
Triathlon	17	16
Tug of War	1	1
Volleyball	12	8
Waterskiing & Wakeboarding	1	0
Weightlifting	4	2
Wheelchair Sport	1	0
Grand Total	2337	1648

Furthermore, details of all applications submitted under the latest round (2018) of the Sports Capital Programme are listed on a county basis on my Department's website at <https://assets.gov.ie/20000/ececa538f64a48e3ab4540515da4cf95.pdf>.

Similarly, details of all allocations under the programme are also published on the Department's website at <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/471ed5-sports-capital-allocations/>

In relation to the latest allocations under the Programme as announced earlier this month, my Department will shortly be in contact with all applicants with full details of the outcome of the assessment process. 537 unsuccessful applicants will be invited to appeal the Department's decision if they believe that their application was not correctly assessed according to the published assessment manual.

### **Road Projects**

257. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if the concerns and questions of residents during public consultation on the new N2 route in Monaghan (details supplied) will be addressed; if he will answer questions concerning same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49455/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and construction of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred your question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Education Data**

258. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of home school community liaison and school completion staff working with homeless families in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49361/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Tusla Educational Support Service has advised that Tessa have advised the HSCL Scheme and SCP projects provide supports for homeless children and families as the need arises in their cluster schools.

There are 420 Home School Community Liaison Coordinators (HSCL) serving over 500 schools and 122 School Completion Programmes (SCP) serving over 700 schools. All HSCL and SCP staff are available to assist families experiencing homelessness. All HSCL and SCP staff are aware of the need to provide supports to families experiencing homelessness and we know that a significant number are currently providing such support.

Along with colleagues in Tusla and across government I recognise that Homelessness is a hugely significant issue facing vulnerable families across the country and it can have an adverse impact on children and their educational attendance, participation and completion. My Department recognises that homelessness is a very fluid issue, emerging quickly and requiring a range of supports from the school, HSCL, SCP and other related services and in this regard I have secured and additional €500,000 in Budget 2019 and a further €400,000 in Budget 2020 to ensure that the needs of vulnerable children in relation to educational attainment are met.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

259. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the

number of agency staff hired and-or engaged by her Department in the past five years to date; the cost per year of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49291/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** My Department has not hired or engaged agency staff in the past five years to date.

### **International Summits**

260. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the outcome of her engagements at the Nairobi summit; the commitments she provided at the summit; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49359/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** Improving maternal and reproductive health is an important focus of Ireland's international development policy with health system strengthening at the heart of Ireland's approach. Ireland works through the UNFPA, the World Health Organisation, with organisations such the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria and with civil society partners to ensure access to essential drugs, health services, and best practice, including building more effective health workforces, with an emphasis on better health outcomes for women and children. Ireland recognises that quality health systems must include access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services if women's health outcomes are to be transformed, including reducing maternal and child mortality. This is consistent with the global ambition of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The SDGs also reaffirm the Programme for Action agreed 25 years ago by 179 countries, including Ireland, at the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). A High Level Summit - "Nairobi Summit on ICPD25: Accelerating the Promise", 12 to 14 November 2019 – was convened by the Governments of Kenya and Denmark, together with UNFPA, to mark the 25 years since Cairo. The Nairobi Summit has helped to galvanise political and financial commitments needed to complete the unfinished business of the ICPD Programme of Action.

I, on behalf of Ireland, reaffirmed Ireland's commitment to the Cairo Programme of Action and the SDGs. In Nairobi I reiterated Ireland's support, including elements relating to women's health and on ending gender based violence. A full list of the commitments made by participants in the Nairobi summit, including Ireland, is available on the ICPD25 website: <https://www.nairobisummiticpd.org/commitments>.

### **Adoption Legislation**

261. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her plans to progress the adoption (information and tracing) Bill 2016 by introducing legislation to allow thousands of adoptees to access their own information; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49427/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** As the Deputy knows, there are strong views on the privacy provisions in the Adoption (Information & Tracing) Bill, 2016 and to the revised scheme set out in my proposed amendments for Committee Stage.

My legal advice is that there must be some protection of birth parents' constitutional right to privacy reflected in the legislation. There are two rights at play, the right to identity and the

right to privacy, and legislation must seek to harmonise these rights. However, I fully recognise this advice is contrary to the desire of advocates for unrestricted access to identity information and to birth certificates.

During the summer, I held a number of consultations with Members of the Oireachtas and with stakeholder groups, to seek to reach a consensus which will allow the legislation to progress. More recently, I have consulted further in relation to a number of specific options for progressing the Bill. I am now considering the responses I have received, and I hope to be in a position to revert to Oireachtas members and stakeholders shortly.

### **LEADER Programmes Funding**

262. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the clubs, groups and organisations that have received funding under the LEADER RDP programme in County Wicklow in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the level of funding provided to each group; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49250/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The LEADER programme is administered in County Wicklow by the Wicklow Local Action Group (LAG).

The Funding Agreement for the LEADER 2014-2020 programme was signed with the Wicklow LAG in July 2016. The programme effectively became operational in County Wicklow from this date. The total amount of funding allocated to County Wicklow for the duration of the LEADER programme to 2020 is in excess of €6.3 million.

No projects were approved for funding in this LAG area in 2016 or 2017 as the initial focus of the LAG was to work with potential project promoters to develop ideas and bring forward proposals for funding. However, there has been a significant increase in project approvals nationally since the start of 2018, and this is also evident in County Wicklow.

The Wicklow LAG has now approved 61 projects applications to a value of over €2.2 million. A further 11 applications, requesting funding in excess of €1.5 million, are at earlier stages in the approvals process.

Payments under the programme will increase significantly as these projects are completed and payment claims are submitted.

Details of all projects funded by the LEADER Local Action Group in County Wicklow are available on-line at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/b849be-local-action-groups-approved-projects-2014-2020/>.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

263. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the number of agency staff hired and-or engaged by his Department in the past five years to date; the cost per year of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49303/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** The Department of Rural and Community Development was established in July 2017. Since its establishment, there have been no agency staff hired and or engaged by the Department.

## **Departmental Funding**

264. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development if funding is available for a community group (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49335/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** My Department provides a range of supports to communities nationwide, helping people to participate in the development of their communities and providing funding to improve community facilities.

For example, my Department funds the Community Enhancement Programme which provided capital grants to the total value of €4.5m in 2019. These grants can contribute towards the renovation of community infrastructure such as that outlined.

While the 2019 programme is closed, it will be open again in 2020. It will then be advertised in each Local Authority area by the Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) who administer the grant on behalf of this Department.

Separately, projects of this nature may also be eligible for LEADER funding.

All potential applicants for LEADER funding must submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) prior to any project application for financial support. In order to determine eligibility to application stage, an appraisal is carried out on the EOI to ascertain if the proposed project is eligible for LEADER funding.

The proposed project must be compatible with the actions outlined in the approved Local Development Strategy for the relevant LEADER sub regional area, and it must comply with the Operating Rules and EU Regulations in place for the programme.

The decision to approve a project, or otherwise, is a matter for the Local Action Group (LAG) which administers the programme in each LEADER area. The community group should, in the first instance, contact the relevant LAG to discuss the eligibility of the proposed project.

The Local Action Group for the area of Kerry referred to is South Kerry Development Partnership CLG.

Contact details for South Kerry Development Partnership CLG are as follows: - Telephone: (066) 9472724; - E-mail: [info@skdp.net](mailto:info@skdp.net).

## **Broadband Service Provision**

265. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the operational details of broadband connection points that will be provided within the first 12 months of the national broadband plan roll-out; the role of his Department in this task; the breakdown of points by county and location in tabular form; the allocated current and capital budget for such points; the number of staff that will be employed to achieve this objective in 2020; the number of premises that fall within the area points will service that are forecasted to be covered under the plan by homes, businesses, farms and schools; and the percentage of overall premises to be connected under the plan the 300 points will service, by homes, businesses, farms and schools. [49396/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney):** The Broadband Connection Point (BCP) initiative will see high-speed broad-

band services bought to approximately 300 sites in remote and rural areas across the country, ahead of the arrival of the National Broadband network.

BCPs are typically community centres, schools and sports clubs that will act as access hubs for local people, providing on-site access to the internet.

The Department of Rural and Community Development has worked with Local Authority Broadband Officers to identify the selected sites and is working closely with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment to establish the BCP network.

The Department's role is to liaise with Local Authorities and to support them as required in this project. The Department will also procure a provider, or providers, for the installation of access infrastructure at the connection points and will provide a subvention to Local Authorities towards the costs of retail services for non-commercial sites and sites with no significant revenue raising activities.

Further details on the BCPs, including the locations of each connection point, are available at <https://nbi.ie/broadband-connection-points/>.

As the procurement process for infrastructure and retail services has not yet been completed, no capital or current expenditure has been allocated to the project by the Department to date, other than through the annual subvention of €42,000 towards the salaries of the Broadband Officers in each Local Authority. However, the Broadband Officers have a wider remit than the BCP project.

The number of people who will be employed in delivering the BCPs arising from the procurement process will be a matter for the successful tenderer(s).

With regard to the coverage of premises within the area of the BCPs, as stated above the BCPs will make internet access available on-site. It is not the objective of the project that they will share or otherwise transmit connectivity to other premises. In any event, the BCP sites have been deliberately selected in remote and sparsely populated areas. Many of these sites are on islands or in areas with widely dispersed and remote homes and businesses.

## **National Broadband Plan**

266. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the specific role of his Department in the national broadband plan; and the action points and associated timetable for each in tabular form. [49397/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Rural and Community Development (Deputy Seán Canney):** The Department of Rural and Community Development has two roles directly relevant to the National Broadband Plan.

The first is to act as co-secretariat to the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce, which I chair. The Taskforce was established in 2016, arising from a commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government, to identify immediate solutions to broadband/mobile phone coverage deficits and to investigate how better services could be provided to consumers prior to full build and roll-out of the network planned under the National Broadband Plan State intervention (NBP).

The Department has played a leading role in the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce, both in terms of secretariat and coordinating functions and in terms of delivering

specific actions in the Taskforce's work programme. Progress reports on the Taskforce's programme are available at:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/215136-mobile-phone-and-broadband-taskforce/>.

The second role my Department plays in relation to the National Broadband Plan relates to the establishment of the nationwide network of Broadband Connection Points (BCPs). The BCP initiative will see high-speed broadband services brought to approximately 300 sites, typically schools, community centres and sports clubs, in remote and rural areas across the country, ahead of the arrival of the National Broadband Plan network.

These sites will provide access to high-speed broadband on-site to local people, facilitating access to online services, with many supporting remote working and study.

The Department has worked with Local Authority Broadband Officers to identify the selected sites and is working closely with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment to establish the BCP network.

The Department will procure a provider, or providers, for the installation of access infrastructure at the connection points and will provide a subvention to Local Authorities towards the costs of retail services for non-commercial sites and sites with no significant revenue raising activities.

The first BCPs are expected to be connected by the end of Q2 2020, with a view to the full number of points being connected within the first year of the NBP roll-out in the State Intervention area.

## **CLÁR Programme**

267. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development the funding provided in 2019 for each measure under the CLÁR programme; the draw down to date; the projected expenditure by year end; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49419/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** I launched the 2019 CLÁR programme on 28 February last, with applications invited under three separate measures:

Measure 1: Support for "School and Community Safety Measures",

Measure 2: Support for "Play Areas and Multi-Use Games Areas", and

Measure 3: Funding for "Community Wellbeing Support".

Community Wellbeing Support covers the provision of equipment and vehicles for voluntary first-response organisations, as well as the provision of specialist vehicles to bring people to cancer-care centres and other community-care services. The measure also provides funding for sensory gardens.

The following table shows the amount approved under each of the Measures, the expenditure paid to date for each Measure, and the expected expenditure by year-end under each Measure for 2019.

It should be noted that the delivery of CLÁR projects can straddle different calendar years

and Local Authorities have until May 2020 to draw down funding under Measures 1, 2 and 3c; therefore it is not expected that there would be any draw-down of funding under these Measures in 2019.

However, total expenditure from the CLÁR budget in my Department's Vote this year will amount to approximately €7 million when payments in respect of projects approved in the 2018 funding round are taken into account.

**CLÁR 2019 Funding Approved, Expenditure to Date and Expected Expenditure by Year End per Measure.**

	Funding Approved	Paid to date 26/11/19	Expected Expenditure by Year End
Measure 1	€2,522,993	€0.00	€0.00
Measure 2	€1,294,460	€0.00	€0.00
Measure 3a	€567,516	€155,229	€400,000
Measure 3b	€890,632	€531,773	€800,000
Measure 3c	€714,456	€0.00	€0.00
TOTAL	€5,990,057	€687,002	€1,200,000

**Carer's Allowance Applications**

268. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will issue on a carer's allowance claim by a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [49235/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a child or an adult who has such a disability that as a result they require that level of care.

An application for carer's allowance (CA) was received from the person concerned on 20 May 2019 in respect of two care recipients.

It is a condition for receipt of CA that the person concerned must be providing full-time care and attention.

The evidence submitted in support of this application was examined and it was decided that while a certain level of care was being provided, the time involved was not considered to be full time in the case of either care recipient. The person concerned was notified on 25 September 2019 of this decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

The person concerned requested a review and submitted additional evidence in support.

On review, the application was awarded to the person concerned on 18 November 2019, with effect from 23 May 2019 for both care recipients. The first payment issued to her nominated bank account on 21 November 2019.

Arrears of allowance due from 23 May 2019 to 20 November 2019 will issue shortly.

The person concerned was notified on 18 November 2019 of this revised decision, the reason for it and of her right of review and appeal.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## **Community Employment Schemes Supervisors**

269. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the progress made to date by the interdepartmental group on the pension issue of community employment supervisors; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49251/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Government decided in January 2019 to set up an Inter-departmental Group (IDG) to explore the most appropriate organisation arrangements for social inclusion work schemes currently operated by my Department. The Group was not set up to consider the pensions of CE supervisors. The final report of the IDG is expected to be available shortly.

In relation to the Deputy's specific question on the 'pension issue of Community Employment Supervisors', my Department is currently engaging with representatives of CE supervisors to discuss issues that arise following a 2008 Labour Court Recommendation in relation to pensions. All parties have agreed that the detail of all discussions undertaken by the group should remain confidential until the process has completed. I expect the related discussions to conclude shortly.

## **State Pension (Contributory) Applications**

270. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a pension application by a person (details supplied). [49253/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The person concerned initially applied for State pension (contributory) on 28 October 2009 in advance of reaching pension age in December 2009. They were assessed as having 22 paid full-rate social insurance contributions. As their contributions fell short of the required 260 paid full-rate contributions to qualify for State pension (contributory), the claim was disallowed. They were notified in writing of this decision.

The person re-applied for State pension (contributory) on 24 October 2019. Their entitlement to both the standard State pension (contributory) and the mixed insurance pro rata State pension (contributory) was examined. The person was again assessed with 22 full-rate contributions, which is less than the statutory minimum requirement of 260 full-rate paid contributions. Their application was disallowed and they were notified accordingly in writing on 11 November 2019.

A copy of their social insurance record was included with the person's pension decision. If they have other periods of insurable employment or self-employment which they consider should be recorded, it is open to them to forward details to my Department and the matter will be examined.

The interim Total Contributions Approach (TCA) to pension calculation, announced in January 2018, includes provision for homecaring periods, but does not apply to people who reached pension age prior to 1 September 2012.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

## **Social Welfare Benefits Applications**

271. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of an application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49281/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I am advised that my Department has not received an application for Injury Benefit from the person concerned.

If the Person Concerned wishes to claim Injury Benefit he should visit his doctor to receive a form IB1 (application form for Illness Benefit and Injury Benefit) and accompanying 'Certificate of Incapacity for Work' and submit these to the Department for processing.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

272. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of agency staff hired and-or engaged by her Department in the past five years to date; the cost per year of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49296/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** My Department does not employ agency staff.

### **Public Services Card**

273. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the way in which private sector companies that provide CVRT tests for commercial vehicles are compliant with schedule 5 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 in respect of the public services card (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49306/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Commercial vehicle testing is carried out by commercial vehicle roadworthy test operators authorised and supervised by the Road Safety Authority (RSA).

Since 2013, the RSA is responsible for the authorisation and supervision of the commercial vehicle testing system under the provisions of the Road Safety Authority (Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness) Act, 2012.

Regulations under that Act, specifying the requirements and arrangements to apply for the compulsory testing of commercial vehicles, require that a person who presents a vehicle for testing presents a driving licence or passport or such photographic identification as the RSA may specify in guidelines.

The RSA is a specified body listed in Schedule 5 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 (as amended).

From 20th May 2018, the RSA guidelines state that a driving licence, passport or Public Services Card may be accepted as a form of photographic identification by persons presenting a vehicle for testing.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Community Employment Schemes Supervisors**

274. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if she will address a matter regarding pensions for community employment supervisors (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49313/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The matter of CE Supervisor Pensions Claim following 2008 Labour Court Recommendation 19293 was the subject of extensive discussion at the Community Sector High Level Forum, chaired by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, which was reconvened to examine certain issues pertaining to the Community Employment sector and in particular to ensure that the matter of pensions was fully examined, having regard to both costs and precedent in the context of the wider Community and Voluntary sector.

The membership of this Forum includes public service management and union representatives. The implications arising from this claim extend well beyond the CE Supervisors and Assistant Supervisors cadre and impact across the entire Community and Voluntary sector.

The reconvening of the High Level Forum is a matter for the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

As the Deputy will be aware, my Department is currently engaging with representatives of CE supervisors to discuss issues arising following the 2008 Labour Court Recommendation and all parties have agreed that the detail of all discussions undertaken by the group should remain confidential until the process has completed. I have asked Deputies to respect these wishes and allow the talks to continue free from speculation.

### **Domiciliary Care Allowance Applications**

275. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made on an application for a domiciliary care allowance by a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49315/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** An application for Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) was received from this lady on the 30th September 2019. Applications received in mid September 2019 are currently being finalised. The application will be considered by a deciding officer in due course and the decision notified to her as soon as possible.

I hope this clarifies the position for the Deputy.

### **Tús Programme**

276. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if an extension will be granted to a person (details supplied) on a Tús scheme. [49352/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Tús commenced operation in 2011 as a response to the high level of unemployment and the large numbers on the Live Register. It is a community work placement initiative which aims to provide short-term work opportunities for those who are unemployed for more than a year.

The duration of the Tús contract is a maximum of 12 months and this ensures that as many people as possible, who are unemployed for over 12 months, are able to benefit from the initiative. There are no circumstances whereby a participant can be allowed to remain on the scheme after they have completed their 12 month contract.

If a person is interested in pursuing a work placement with training and development opportunities, it is open to them to apply for a placement on a Community Employment (CE) scheme. CE participants between 21 and 55 years are entitled to one year on the programme. This can be extended by up to 2 more years if they are engaged in a recognised training or education award that is helping them progress towards employment. All CE participants age 55 and over can avail of 3 consecutive years on a CE scheme. The overall limit of participation on CE is 6 years from 1st January 2007 (7 years if on a disability payment).

Participants aged 62 and over are allowed to participate on a continuous basis up to the State Pension age on the CE Service Support Stream (SSS). A limited number of SSS places are available and these are subject to certain criteria.

The Department keeps all aspects of its activation programmes under review to ensure the best outcomes for participants and communities whilst also having regard to the, thankfully, much reduced number of people claiming jobseeker payments and the increasing number of job opportunities.

### **Invalidity Pension Applications**

277. **Deputy Sean Sherlock** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will issue on an invalidity pension claim by a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [49357/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The gentleman referred to has been awarded invalidity pension with effect from 25 July 2019. Payment will issue to his nominated bank account on 05 December 2019. Any arrears due from 25 July 2019 to 04 December 2019 (less any overlapping social welfare payment) will issue as soon as possible. The gentleman in question was notified of this decision on 25 November 2019.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Applications**

278. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a carer's allowance application by a person (details supplied) which is now under appeal; and if the matter will be expedited in view of the circumstances. [49370/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Carer's allowance (CA) is a means-tested social assistance payment made to a person who is habitually resident in the State and who is providing full-time care and attention to a person who has such a disability that they require that level of care.

Once claims are in payment, the Department periodically reviews them to ensure that there is continued entitlement. Depending on the circumstances in each case and to make best use of resources, a review may only concentrate on a specific condition of entitlement.

I am advised that following a review of means, it was determined that the person in respect of whom CA was being paid, was entitled to a lower rate of payment from 8 January 2015 to 12 June 2019, as means from a pension income for his spouse had not been disclosed to my department. As a result it was determined that he had been overpaid €11,578.60 during this period.

The person concerned was notified on 21 November 2019 of this decision, the reason for it and of his right of review and appeal. A breakdown of the calculation of the debt was enclosed.

To date, no request for an appeal, or further review of the decision has been received by my Department. If the person wishes to pursue an appeal, they should contact the Social Welfare Appeals Office setting out the grounds of their appeal. Alternatively, they can seek a review of the decision if additional relevant information is available. All circumstances outlined to my Department at that time will be considered.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Jobseeker's Allowance Applications**

279. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when a decision will be made on a jobseeker's allowance application by a person (details supplied); the reason for the delay in same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49374/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The person concerned made an application for a Jobseeker's Transitional Payment on 5 September, 2019.

Insufficient information was provided by the person concerned and this, together with a change in address and telephone number, has led to a delay in processing their claim. The claim is currently assigned to a Social Welfare Inspector for investigation. Additional information has been requested by the Inspector and, when it is received, the Inspector will be in a position to finalise their report and submit it to a Deciding Officer for decision.

While awaiting a decision on their claim, the person concerned has received financial assistance from my Department in the form of Exceptional Needs Payments under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Defective Building Materials**

280. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of the proposed pyrite and mica scheme; the status of the scheme; when affected residents in County Mayo can expect the scheme to be administered; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49233/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** Last year, the Government agreed in principle to introduce a

scheme to support affected homeowners in the counties of Donegal and Mayo to carry out the necessary remediation works to dwellings that have been significantly damaged due to defective concrete blocks.

Budget 2020 provides funding of €40 million to fund the operation of the pyrite remediation scheme and this new scheme to address the issues identified in Donegal and Mayo. Funding for future years will be agreed on an annual basis as part of the normal Estimates process and additional funding can be provided should it be required.

The full terms and conditions of the scheme are currently being finalised in consultation with the Attorney General's Office and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, including the development of the necessary regulations.

This process takes account of the engagement that my Department is currently having with both Donegal and Mayo County Councils, who will operate and administer the scheme.

In this regard, my Department continues to meet with both local authority teams to conclude implementation arrangements for the scheme. Further engagement will take place over the coming weeks.

The aim will be to complete the outstanding work without delay in order to ensure that the scheme can get underway as early as possible.

### **Foreshore Issues**

281. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if his Department has received correspondence from Donegal County Council concerning proposals to install a sculpture on Magheraclogher Beach (details supplied) regarding the relevant foreshore considerations which such a project would entail; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49171/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English):** To date, no formal application for consent under the Foreshore Acts 1933-2011 has been received. Details on the application process are available on my Department's website at the following link: [www.housing.gov.ie/planning/foreshore/applying-consent/consent-process-explained](http://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/foreshore/applying-consent/consent-process-explained).

### **Local Authority Funding**

282. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of a payment to Sligo County Council (details supplied); if the allocation of additional funding to the council has been approved in order to allow same to appoint a land asset management team and the staffing levels required as outlined to his Department on 11 October 2019; when the funding will be allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49183/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan):** My Department is supporting Sligo County Council to meet the ambitious objectives for Sligo as envisaged in the National Planning Framework. To this end, I visited Sligo earlier this year with a multi-disciplinary team from my Department to meet with a similar delegation from Sligo. The Council has ambitious plans itself and my Department is working with the Council to support their achievement. In this regard, as a follow up to

the Sligo meeting, we have put Sligo forward to participate in the Joint Assistance to Support Regions programme, under the auspices of the European Investment Bank, which will, inter alia, help maximise the potential of the €8.5m allocated to Sligo by my Department under the Urban Regeneration Development Fund.

As regards funding, the elected members have direct responsibility for adopting the annual budget, and are democratically accountable for all expenditure by the local authority. It is a matter for Sligo County Council to manage its resources and determine its own spending priorities having regard to needs and available resources. While it is a matter for individual local authorities to manage their own day-to-day finances in a prudent and sustainable manner, my Department works closely with Sligo County Council in relation to both its financial position and overall staffing requirements.

Sligo County Council has a financial plan in place and is working towards financial sustainability. In this context, my Department has supported the Council with an additional annual allocation from the Local Government Fund for the years 2014 to 2019 on the basis that agreed targets in the Plan are met. In March 2014, following a meeting with my Department wherein a draft financial plan was submitted, it was decided to provide Sligo County Council with €250,000. However, in the absence of the detailed plan being finally agreed before the end of 2014 it was not possible to make a further payment to Sligo at that time. Subsequently, the financial plan for the years 2015 - 2019 was agreed in late 2015. Sligo County Council advised my Department in early 2017 that the “revenue cumulative surplus” as profiled in the plan for delivery in the years 2017 onwards was no longer achievable. As a result, the plan was extended, including revised targets, to 2027.

An additional amount of €1 million had been paid for 2015, 2016 and 2017 but the payment for 2018, was reduced to €200k to reflect the reduced surplus that could be achieved in 2017 based on the information available at the time. As the actual 2017 surplus was ultimately higher than was anticipated by Sligo County Council, a higher payment of €700,000 was made by my Department.

Under section 159 of the Local Government Act 2001, each Chief Executive is responsible for the staffing and organisational arrangements necessary for carrying out the functions of the local authorities for which he or she is responsible. It is therefore, a matter for each individual Chief Executive to apply for sanction from my Department and, once approved, to recruit and assign staff to specific divisions within their organisation. Staffing sanction requests are examined on a case by case basis having due regard to the continued delivery of key services in the context of staffing and budgetary constraints. My Department is working with Sligo County Council on the staffing requests mentioned in the question.

Significant additional resources were made available to Sligo County Council in the context of the financial plan, far in excess of additional support to any other local authority. Any further funding for Sligo County Council, will be considered within the overall framework of the Financial Plan. In this regard, Sligo County Council’s audited Annual Financial Statement for 2018 is currently under review in order to determine the amount of the next payment. The allocation that will be due when that review is complete will be for use at Sligo County Council’s discretion and can be directed towards the costs of establishing a Land Asset Team, if that is the preferred approach.

## **Rental Sector**

283. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Gov-

ernment the number of rental properties and the number of landlords in the private rental sector in each of the years 2012 to 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49234/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department does not hold or collate the information referred to in the Question.

The Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) which was established as an independent statutory body under the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2019, operates a national tenancy registration system.

The Clerk of the Dáil requested that arrangements be put in place to facilitate the provision of information by State Bodies to members of the Oireachtas. Following the issue of Circular LG (P)05/16 on 20 September 2016 from my Department, the RTB set up a dedicated email address for this purpose. The RTB may be contacted at [OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie](mailto:OireachtasMembersQueries@rtb.ie) to establish the extent to which it may hold the information sought.

### **Local Authority Funding**

284. **Deputy Pat Casey** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the funding which will be provided to Wicklow County Council in 2020 in lieu of the loss of commercial rates from Irish Water properties; the funding provided to date in 2019; the loss of income incurred; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49255/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy John Paul Phelan):** Since 2015, all local authorities have been compensated for commercial rates foregone as a result of the decision to make Irish Water non-rateable in 2014. In consultation with the local authority sector, commercial rates are being re-introduced for Irish Water and from next year, Irish Water will pay commercial rates like other utilities and there will no longer be any general need for compensation in lieu of rates.

Based on the valuation, by the independent Commissioner for Valuation, it is expected that overall, the local government sector should collect a broadly similar amount in commercial rates to that previously provided as exchequer funded water rates compensation. However, due to the distribution of the income from Irish Water commercial rates, on the same basis as other utilities, some local authorities will receive less in commercial rates than they received in compensation, with others receiving more. Of the small number of local authorities negatively impacted, it is accepted that Wicklow County Council would be disproportionately impacted by the level of income reduction in the context of its Budget for 2020.

My Department has monitored the impact of the transition across local authorities and having carefully considered the challenges faced by Wicklow County Council, my colleague, the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government and I have agreed the allocation of financial support to Wicklow County Council in the amount of €300,000.

This level of support will significantly mitigate the impact in 2020. Looking further ahead, it is important that the Council continues to work to achieve savings, efficiencies and improvements in income generation and collection as this funding represents a once off special allocation that will not be repeated in subsequent years. My Department will continue to work with the Council to this end.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

285. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of agency staff hired and-or engaged by his Department in the past five years to date; the cost per year of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49300/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department has not hired or engaged any agency staff in the past 5 years to date.

### **Housing Assistance Payment**

286. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if he will publish and-or provide the most recent recommendations made by the HAP practitioners forum to him and his responses to those recommendations over the past two years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49310/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme was rolled out in four waves between September 2014 and March 2017. The nationwide rollout of the scheme was completed with its introduction, on 1 March 2017, to the administrative areas of Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council.

HAP plays a vital role in housing eligible families and individuals. At the end of Q2 2019, over 62,700 HAP tenancies had been set-up since the scheme commenced, of which there were more than 48,000 households actively in receipt of HAP support and over 28,000 separate landlords and agents providing accommodation to households supported by the scheme.

A governance structure was put in place for the implementation of the HAP scheme. A HAP Oversight Group, co-chaired by the Secretaries General of my Department and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, was established to oversee the implementation of the scheme. A Project Board, which reports to the HAP Oversight Group, is responsible for the detailed implementation and delivery of the scheme.

A number of subgroups were established to support the rollout and implementation of the HAP scheme, including an ICT System Subgroup, Communications Subgroup and the HAP Practitioners Forum.

The HAP Practitioners Forum comprises of representatives of all HAP local authorities. Rather than being a vehicle for making formal recommendations, the forum is a key information exchange and problem-solving group for the HAP project. The Forum is charged with ensuring that any operational issues arising are discussed and addressed and that there is consistent implementation of the scheme across local authorities.

The Housing Agency assists in the organisation of meetings of the HAP Practitioners Forum. The Forum has met on 5 occasions to date:

13 June 2018

21 June 2017

6 December 2016

14 June 2016

23 March 2016

The presentations and discussions that take place at the forum include updates from my Department and the HAP Shared Services Centre, as well as relevant topics such as Standards for Rented Housing Regulations; Place Finder Service; Changes to RTB Legislation; Rent Predictability Measure and transfers from Rent Supplement.

I am satisfied with the governance structures in place to oversee the implementation of the HAP scheme but my Department will keep these under review as part of its wider oversight of the implementation of the Scheme.

### **Water Services Funding**

287. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when funding will be provided to local authorities for the upgrade of domestic wells; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49358/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** There is a grant currently available, which is funded by my Department through the local authorities, for the provision or necessary improvement of an individual water supply in a house. This is more commonly called the individual or private wells grant.

The grant, subject to certain conditions, assists households dependent on these supplies with the costs incurred in providing such a supply of water for domestic purposes or rectifying serious deficiencies with an existing supply.

Earlier this year I announced details of the new Multi-annual Rural Water Programme 2019-2021. This included an improved funding scheme for individual wells.

Work is at an advanced stage of development for the new scheme. I expect that the process will be completed shortly when the necessary regulations dealing with the financial assistance arrangements and related administrative matters are put in place. This will enable a circular letter, terms and conditions, guidance and the application form to issue to local authorities shortly thereafter.

Information on the existing grant scheme is available from local authorities and from my Department's website at the link. This will be updated once the new scheme comes into operation.

[www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-services/rural-water-programme/private-wells](http://www.housing.gov.ie/water/water-services/rural-water-programme/private-wells).

### **Homeless Persons Supports**

288. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of free public transport to children in emergency accommodation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49362/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Supporting individuals and families experiencing homelessness is a priority for this Government. Rebuilding Ireland, the Government's Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness includes a range of measures relating to the provision of emergency accommodation and the range of supports to be provided to households experiencing homelessness.

Under Rebuilding Ireland, my Department is funding an initiative to provide homeless

families residing in temporary emergency accommodation in the Dublin Region with access to free public transport for essential school journeys. The Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) oversees the implementation of this initiative and, working in partnership with the National Transport Authority, has put arrangements in place for the provision of Leap cards to the families concerned. These Leap cards provide for free public transport for school-going children and accompanying adults, where necessary.

### **Homeless Persons Supports**

289. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the pilot project that will be introduced to support the family functioning of homeless families in emergency accommodation by providing off-site or near-site family time, including play, homework, cooking and washing facilities, family support and parent support. [49363/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Supporting families experiencing homelessness is a key priority of Government. Rebuilding Ireland, the Government's Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, includes the objective that hotels will only be used in limited circumstances as emergency accommodation for families. Rebuilding Ireland also sought to ensure that families experiencing homelessness are provided with appropriate emergency accommodation and supports until such time as a home can be secured. To meet this objective, housing authorities are pursuing the delivery of a range of additional and enhanced family-focused facilities, or family hubs.

Family hubs offer family living arrangements with a greater level of stability than is possible in hotel accommodation, with the capacity to provide appropriate play-space, cooking and laundry facilities and communal recreation space. This setting also allows for more intensive supports to be provided to families where needed while move-on options to long-term tenancies are identified and secured.

There are currently 30 hubs operational nationally, offering almost 690 units of family accommodation in urban areas. There are 23 family hubs in Dublin, two in Kildare and one each in Clare, Cork, Limerick, Louth and Galway. Further facilities will become operational through the end of 2019 and on an ongoing basis into 2020, details of which will become available as projects are finalised by housing authorities.

### **Homeless Accommodation Provision**

290. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of a safety guidance and voluntary code for child safety in emergency accommodation. [49364/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Supporting individuals and families experiencing homelessness is a priority for this Government. Rebuilding Ireland, the Government's Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness includes a range of measures relating to the provision of emergency accommodation and the range of supports to be provided to households experiencing homelessness.

Arising out of a commitment made in Rebuilding Ireland, a specific course on child protection was developed in partnership between the Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) and Tusla. The DRHE has been providing Child Protection training to Private Emergency Ac-

accommodation staff, which covers their legal responsibilities under child protection legislation, reviewing the reasonable grounds for concern and the thresholds for reporting and reporting concerns where appropriate. Child protection booklets have been distributed to operators of private emergency accommodation. Child safety is an integral element of the National Quality Standards Framework for Homeless Services, which is fully operational in Dublin and is being rolled out nationally over a 12-month period from 1 July 2019.

### **Homeless Accommodation Provision**

291. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of a new facility with accommodation for pregnant women who are homeless. [49365/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility for the provision of accommodation and related services rests with individual housing authorities.

Rebuilding Ireland, the Government's Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness includes a range of measures to support individuals and families experiencing homelessness. One of the measures is to provide a new facility in the Dublin region for pregnant women who are experiencing homelessness. This facility is now operational and has capacity for up to six women. In addition, a number of family hubs operating in the Dublin region have accommodation and supports designated for pregnant women.

### **Homeless Accommodation Provision**

292. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of tenancies provided by housing first teams in Dublin in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date 2019. [49366/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Housing First enables homeless individuals with high levels of complex needs to obtain permanent secure accommodation with the provision of intensive housing and health supports to help them maintain their tenancies.

The National Implementation Plan for Housing First, published in September 2018, which puts the programme on a national footing, is designed to provide this response, by delivering permanent housing solutions and associated supports for rough sleepers and long-term users of emergency accommodation. It extends the delivery of Housing First nationally, with the introduction of targets for each local authority. The Plan includes an overall target of 663 tenancies in the period 2018-2021. The implementation of the Plan is a joint initiative of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, the Department of Health, the HSE and the local authorities.

The Housing First programme has been operating in the Dublin region since 2014, following a successful pilot. A total of 34 tenancies were created in 2016, 106 tenancies in 2017, 83 tenancies in 2018 and 94 tenancies up to October 2019.

Following a tendering process by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, the Peter McVer-

ry Trust will operate this service to deliver a further 400 Housing First tenancies over the next three years.

### **Capital Assistance Scheme Data**

293. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the specific funding under the capital assistance scheme for AHBs to respond to the accommodation needs of young persons who leave State care in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date in 2019. [49367/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Under my Department's Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS), capital funding of up to 100% of project costs may be advanced by local authorities to Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to provide housing for specific categories of housing need, which can include persons leaving State care. Under this heading, where a local authority is informed by Tusla that there is a need for accommodation for people aged 18-21 (or up to 23 if in education/training) leaving State care and who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, it may invite AHBs to apply for CAS funding to provide appropriate accommodation.

There is no specific amount of the overall annual CAS allocation ring-fenced for such projects. Instead, my Department provides funding for individual projects as they are advanced by the local authorities on a project by project basis.

### **Domestic Violence Policy**

294. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of specific policy and procedural guidance to housing authorities with regard to the role they can play to assist victims of domestic violence to secure new, independent tenancies as required. [49368/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** My Department's role in relation to homelessness involves the provision of a national framework of policy, legislation and funding to underpin the role of housing authorities in addressing homelessness at local level. Statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of accommodation and related services for homeless persons rests with individual housing authorities. Responsibility for the provision, funding and oversight of services to support victims of domestic violence, including refuges, rests with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, under the aegis of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

In line with commitments made under Rebuilding Ireland, my Department issued guidance in January 2017 to all local authorities in relation to assisting victims of domestic violence with emergency and long-term accommodation needs. The guidance is also a useful reference for service providers working in the domestic violence services sector, highlighting where they can be of greatest assistance to their clients, covering a range of scenarios that may arise for victims of domestic violence in seeking social housing supports. These include provisions around the use of the Housing Assistance Payment scheme, or the Rental Accommodation Scheme, where a victim has a joint interest in the family home, or ownership of alternative accommodation, but would otherwise qualify for social housing support.

295. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the housing procurement office in the Housing Agency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49369/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Pillar 2 of Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness committed to the establishment of a Housing Procurement Unit within the Housing Agency to provide a procurement centre of excellence and advice to support local authorities and Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) in the accelerated delivery of their social housing programmes.

The unit forms part of the professional technical section within the Housing Agency which deals with projects, including the pyrite remediation scheme, and offers procurement advice and services to assist in the delivery of social housing.

The Procurement Unit works closely with the other services within the Agency and also works with my Department, the Office of Government Procurement (OGP), Irish Council for Social Housing, Local Government Management Agency, City and County Managers Association, the Housing Finance Agency and others to ensure that information and technical assistance provided is current, accurate, helpful and contributes to housing delivery.

The Procurement Unit offers the following services:

- Provides procurement and project management advice and support for local authorities and AHBs in the accelerated delivery of their social housing programmes;
- Works with local authorities and AHBs to build their capacity and expertise;
- Co-ordinates and supports project development and project briefs, where requested by local authorities and AHBs;
- Manages the design and tendering processes as required;
- Provides general guidance and advice on social housing delivery;
- Supports the accelerated delivery of social housing programmes.

To date, the unit has managed the tender and appointment of consultant design teams for Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 Approved Housing Bodies for over 30 housing projects in nine local authority areas. Each tender package was tailored for the specific needs of the client to ensure they get their required services within a procurement process carried out to best practice.

The unit has assisted in procuring design teams for a wide range of projects including a large inner city urban development, refurbishment and conversion of existing buildings, a major 4-storey extension to a sheltered accommodation unit and the conversion of a rural post-office into housing units.

The unit provides a continued technical service to local authorities and AHBs after the appointment of the design teams and remains available to answer queries and offer independent opinion on issues that may arise and on technical issues arising from the procurement process, irrespective of who carried out the procurement.

The unit is available to work with local authorities and AHBs in the procurement of both consultants and works contractors, with experience of establishing and operating all of the building works contracts within the Capital Works Management Framework (CWMF), including: Frameworks, Employer Design, Contractor Design, Minor Works under Pillar 1, and service agreements for consultancy services contracts under Pillar 2 of the CWMF.

The unit has also experience of alternative procurement processes including competitive dialogue, and has assisted the OGP in setting up frameworks.

### **Planning Issues**

296. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if consideration will be given to a proposal (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49400/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** As indicated in my reply to Question No. 1768 of 16 January 2018, in making a decision on a planning application or appeal, a planning authority or An Bord Pleanála must consider the proper planning and sustainable development of the area concerned while having regard to the provisions of the relevant development plan, relevant Ministerial or Government policies and guidelines, as well as the views of members of the public on the proposed development.

Public participation is, therefore, a crucial element of all substantive decision-making processes under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and is also a requirement under the UN Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation on Decision Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Aarhus Convention) and the European Union Environmental Impact Assessment Directive 2011/92/EU in relation to specific types of developments.

It is open to any member of the public to make an observation or submission on a planning application and the planning authority is statutorily obliged to consider such submissions before making a decision on the application. Persons who make submissions are also entitled to be notified of any significant further information provided to the planning authority by the applicant and to be notified of the authority's decision on the application. Furthermore, any person who made a submission on a planning application may appeal the planning authority's decision on the application to An Bord Pleanála or may make a submission to the Board in relation to an appeal of that decision.

The fees payable by members of the public to participate in the planning decision-making process are set at a level that, as well as contributing towards the cost of processing applications and appeals, discourages frivolous or vexatious submissions without hindering genuine public participation. In addition, the Board has discretion to dismiss an appeal where it is satisfied that the appeal is vexatious, frivolous or without substance or foundation, or where the appeal is made with the sole intention of delaying development or of securing the payment of money, gifts, considerations or other inducement by any person.

I am satisfied that the current arrangements in relation to public participation in decision-making contribute significantly to the openness and transparency of the planning process and I have no proposals to amend the legislation in this regard

### **Residential Tenancies Board**

297. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on the changes to Residential Tenancies Board rates. [49404/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The amendments to sections 137 and 137A of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004, as amend-

ed, update the RTB tenancy registration fee in the context of the move to annual registration - providing a €40 fee per tenancy registration by private providers and €20 per tenancy registration by an Approved Housing Body (AHB). Under the new annual registration requirements, a fee can only be charged in respect of the same dwelling once per year and a discounted single registration fee (€170 for a private landlord, €85 for an AHB landlord) can be applied where the same landlord registers up to 10 tenancies of dwellings comprised in the same property.

The key change from the existing tenancy registration fees is that AHBs will be charged fees that are half those applicable to private providers – currently, all landlords pay the same registration fee. The reduction in AHB fees is provided in recognition of the public service that they provide in meeting the housing needs of those in receipt of social housing supports, and of AHBs' charitable (or similar) status.

The 2019 Act also provides for penalties for late registration of tenancies of €10 for every month, or part thereof, that passes until the tenancy is registered.

The provisions requiring the annual registration of tenancies are planned for commencement in Q1 2020. Preparations are underway in the RTB to roll out a simple online registration system to cater for annual registration.

### **Grant Aid**

298. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if there is grant aid available for persons wishing to construct a granny flat at their residence which would enable a young couple to reside in the existing dwelling house and the elderly parents to reside in a new granny flat (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [49443/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** There is no grant aid available from my Department for the provision of granny flats.

My Department does provide funding to local authorities in respect of the Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability, to assist eligible people in private houses to make their accommodation more suitable for their needs. The suite of grants includes the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability, the Mobility Aids Grant and the Housing Aid for Older People, which are 80% funded by the Department, with a 20% contribution from the resources of the local authority. The scheme is more sharply focused towards lower income households with the greatest needs. A means test applies to the scheme in order to achieve fairness and value for money in its operation.

The detailed administration of the grants, including the assessment, approval and prioritisation of applications, is the responsibility of the local authorities.

### **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

299. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the measures proposed to protect blanket bogs under the land use, land-use change and forestry. [49423/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** Under the EU Land Use and Forestry Regulation for 2021-2030, EU Member States have to ensure that greenhouse gas emissions from land use, land use change or forestry (LULUCF) are offset

by at least an equivalent removal of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere during this period. The Regulation implements the agreement between EU leaders in October 2014 that all sectors should contribute to the EU's 2030 emission reduction target, including the land use sector. It is also in line with the Paris Agreement, which points to the critical role of the land use sector in reaching our long-term climate mitigation objectives.

The primary legislation underpinning the protection and conservation of nature in Ireland are the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2018, the implementation of which falls under the remit of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The Wildlife Acts afford protection to a range of habitats and species and provide for regulation and control of activities that impinge on biodiversity. The basic designation for wildlife is the Natural Heritage Area (NHA), an area considered important for the habitats present or which holds species of plants and animals whose habitat needs protection.

73 blanket bogs, covering 37,000ha, are designated as NHAs.

The legislative framework in place to protect our natural habitats is further strengthened by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 SI No 477/2011, which also falls under the remit of my Department. These Regulations transpose the EU Birds Directive and the EU Habitats Directive into national law, and provide for protection of certain habitats and species across the European Union, giving a framework for specific measures to be taken to target areas of concern in each Member State. The main instruments provided for are the designation of Special Protection Areas (SPA), aimed at the protection of threatened species of birds, and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), aimed at protecting other animal species and habitats.

Ireland has identified 50 areas as Special Areas of Conservation for the protection of blanket bog. These SACs include lowland and mountain blanket bog areas, predominantly along the western Atlantic seaboard but also widely distributed on upland areas.

The LULUCF Regulation aims to include managed wetlands, such as blanket bogs, in our Greenhouse Gas (GHG) accounting by 2026. To this end, a working group, including representatives from my Department, has been established by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment to formulate how accounting for managed wetlands can be achieved in the context of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and in compliance with the relevant EU legislation.

Greenhouse gas emissions and removals associated with land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF), as reported in Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions inventory prepared by the Environmental Protection Agency, include activities associated with afforestation and forestry harvesting, grassland and cropland management under agricultural use, managed and unmanaged wetlands, and other land-use categories. While such emissions are not currently accounted for in relation to the calculation of compliance with Ireland's emissions targets in the period to 2020, from 2021 onwards these emissions will be integrated into the EU framework for compliance with national emissions targets.

### **National Raised Bog Management Plan**

300. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the breakdown of the budget 2020 measures for bog restoration and rehabilitation to be funded under just transition; the role her Department plays in co-financing research and EU LIFE projects in the region; and the way in which she intends to engage with academic research in the

activity in order to scale up projects to avoid further carbon losses after 2021. [49424/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** A key element of the National Raised Bog Special Areas of Conservation Management Plan 2017-2022, approved by the Government and published by my Department in December 2017, is to maintain active raised bog habitat and restore degraded raised bog habitat to active raised bog habitat.

The national restoration programme for Ireland's raised bog special areas of conservation and natural heritage areas is contained within this Plan. It was intended to restore all designated raised bogs within 3 cycles, with the first cycle operating for the duration of the Management Plan.

Work on the restoration programme has already begun with a €5.4m project 'The Living Bog' which is funded under the EU LIFE 2014-2020 programme. The Department is managing this project and is contributing €1.352m, as well as ecological expertise, with the European Commission providing €4.056m.

The Living Bog project, which commenced in 2016 and will conclude at the end of 2020, aims to restore the favourable conservation condition and increase the area for active raised bog by 277 hectares on the 12 raised bog special area of conservation project sites in the Border-Midlands-West region. Restoration works have been completed to date on 6 LIFE project special area of conservation sites.

In tandem with the LIFE project, the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department is undertaking restoration works on State owned lands within the designated raised bog network.

The raised bog designated sites restoration programme can now be accelerated due to the announcement in Budget 2020 of €5m for peatlands restoration. This funding will allow for restoration measures to be undertaken on approximately 1,800 hectares in 2020 on up to 9 raised bog designated sites across 7 counties and the installation of an Eddy Covariance Flux tower on a representative bog to directly observe the exchanges of gas, energy, and momentum between the ecosystem and the atmosphere. The flux tower will directly measure the carbon, water, and heat flows between plant communities and the atmosphere. A further 23 raised bog designated sites have been identified for restoration works over the next number of years under the programme.

My Department is part of a consortium with another Government Department, State bodies and other institutions which is considering submitting an EU LIFE programme application in 2020, part of which could include the restoration of a number of raised bogs.

It is also a partner in an Environmental Protection Agency funded project, led by Trinity College Dublin, that is seeking to quantify carbon emissions from raised bogs across a range of degradation conditions and has part-funded an Eddy Covariance Flux tower at Clara Bog Special Area of Conservation. The Department has also funded the installation of hydrometric stations to measure dissolved carbon in water at this site.

In addition, the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department is co-funding a project on the vulnerability of peatland ecosystems to a changing climate and increases in the frequency and severity of droughts as part of the 2019 Environmental Protection Agency research calls, with a budget for the project of up to €300,000. This project is being led by Dublin City University.

## **Departmental Staff Data**

301. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the number of agency staff hired and-or engaged by her Department in the past five years to date; the cost per year of same; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49293/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I am advised that there have been no agency staff hired or engaged by my Department in the past 5 years to date.

## **Legislative Measures**

302. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the timetable for the passing of the Wildlife (Amendment) Bill 2016 through all Stages in the Houses of the Oireachtas; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49311/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The Review of Raised Bog Natural Heritage Area Network, published in January 2014, provides detail on arrangements regarding turf cutting on each of the 75 raised bog natural heritage areas. The review concluded that Ireland could more effectively achieve conservation of threatened raised bog habitat through focused protection and restoration of a reconfigured network. This reconfigured network entails:

1. The cessation of turf-cutting on 36 existing natural heritage areas, which will remain designated - this includes 7 sites to be divided, with part to be conserved and part de-designated;

2. The de-designation of 46 natural heritage areas - including the relevant areas of the 7 sites to be divided - where it has been judged that their conservation potential is expected to be marginal and/or that restoration would be prohibitively expensive for the conservation benefits achieved; and

3. The designation as natural heritage areas of 25 currently undesignated raised bogs, which are in public ownership or where there is reduced turf cutting pressure. These sites are to be proposed for designation to make up for the loss of habitat within the natural heritage area sites where turf cutting is to continue.

The Wildlife (Amendment) Bill 2016, aims to give legal effect to the proposed reconfiguration of the raised bog natural heritage area network arising from the 2014 review and provides for a review(s) of blanket bog natural heritage areas. The Bill has been presented to and passed by Dáil Éireann and has passed all stages in Seanad Éireann. A number of amendments to the Bill have been made in the Seanad and these amendments are now for consideration by the Dáil.

## **Legislative Programme**

303. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht her plans to update the National Monuments Act 1930 to 2004; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49375/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** Ireland enjoys a unique wealth and variety of archaeological monuments and sites which are a vital part of our heritage. The protection and preservation of our archaeological heritage, and the

regulation of related activities, is currently provided for under the National Monuments Acts 1930-2014.

The original 1930 Act came into being in very different times and has been frequently and significantly altered in the meantime. The resulting complex legislative framework is no longer adequately reflective of, or responsive to, today's heritage conservation priorities or the economic, social and infrastructural requirements it now has to deal with.

My Department is currently advancing the preparation of new legislation to repeal the existing Acts in their entirety and create a modern consolidated legal framework designed to effectively meet the challenges of today's operating environment. It will also allow the State to ratify key international conventions in the area of heritage protection. Preparation of the new legislation is at an advanced stage.

### **National Raised Bog Management Plan**

304. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the bog restoration and rehabilitation measures that will be funded through the NPWS; the estimated cost of availing of the land use, land-use change and forestry flexibilities as they relate to peatlands; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [49425/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** A key element of the National Raised Bog Special Areas of Conservation Management Plan 2017-2022, approved by the Government and published by my Department in December 2017, is to maintain active raised bog habitat and restore degraded raised bog habitat to active raised bog habitat.

The national restoration programme for Ireland's raised bog special areas of conservation and natural heritage areas is contained within this Plan. It was intended to restore all designated raised bogs within 3 cycles, with the first cycle operating for the duration of the Management Plan.

This programme can now be accelerated due to the announcement in Budget 2020 of €5m for peatlands restoration. This funding will allow for restoration measures to be undertaken on approximately 1,800 hectares in 2020 on up to 9 raised bog designated sites across 7 counties and the installation of an Eddy Covariance Flux tower on a bog to measure surface to atmospheric fluxes (CO<sub>2</sub>, Methane, turbulent energy, moisture etc.). A further 23 raised bog designated sites have been identified for restoration works over the next number of years under the programme.

A working group, including representatives from my Department, has been established by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment to formulate how accounting for managed wetlands can be achieved in the context of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and in compliance with the relevant EU legislation. Greenhouse gas emissions and removals associated with land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF), as reported in Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions inventory prepared by the Environmental Protection Agency, include activities associated with afforestation and forestry harvesting, grassland and cropland management under agricultural use, managed and unmanaged wetlands, and other land-use categories. While such emissions are not currently accounted for in relation to the calculation of compliance with Ireland's emissions targets in the period to 2020, from 2021 onwards these emissions will be integrated into the EU framework for compliance with national emissions targets.

*Questions - Written Answers*

I understand that there are no costs associated with availing of the land use, land-use change and forestry flexibility. The costs arise in the implementation of programmes, be it afforestation, wetland restoration etc.