



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithe*
(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 16 Meitheamh 2021

Wednesday, 16 June 2021

Chuaigh an Leas-Cheann Comhairle i gceannas ar 9.10 a.m.

***Paidir agus Machnamh.
Prayer and Reflection.***

Ábhair Shaincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Matters

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 37 and the name of the Member in each case: (1) Deputy Mairéad Farrell - the current lack of paediatric pain consultants in the country available to see children; (2) Deputy Richard Bruton - the need for more ambition in Ireland's circular economy strategy; (3) Deputies Thomas Pringle, Joan Collins and Richard Boyd Barrett - support for Noah Donohoe's family for an independent investigation into his death one year ago; (4) Deputy Marian Harkin - the need for funding for the Yeats Society Sligo; (5) Deputy Ged Nash - the need for a full-time Garda station in Laytown, County Meath; (6) Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív - the need for religious services and visits to recommence in prisons in view of the fact that the Covid-19 vaccine has been rolled out; (7) Deputy Paul McAuliffe - the issue of local employment services tender; (8) Deputy Bríd Smith - the detailed financial information demanded by estate agents prior to arranging home viewings; (9) Deputy Bernard J. Durkan - the need for carbon reduction and a globally sustainable agrifood business to survive side by side; (10) Deputy Mick Barry - the grading of leaving certificate oral examinations; (11) Deputy Kieran O'Donnell - the plans to ensure no delay in the roll-out of the vaccination programme for Limerick; (12) Deputy Richard O'Donoghue - any compensation for the continued costs incurred by rural people who have no access to public transport; (13) Deputy John Lahart - the relocation of Firhouse Educate Together Secondary School to the grounds of Firhouse College; (14) Deputy Martin Browne - the benefits of the proposed M24 route as an alternative to the proposed M20 route from Limerick to Cork; (15) Deputy Colm Burke - engagement with the banking sector to prevent charges being imposed on legal practices in respect of moneys held in clients' accounts; (16) Deputy Paul Murphy - the planned changes to quarantine requirements for those arriving from England, Scotland and Wales; and (17) Deputy Gino Kenny - the second vaccine for 60 to 69-year-olds.

The matters raised by Deputies Richard Bruton, Mairéad Farrell, Éamon Ó Cuív and Marian Harkin have been selected for discussion.

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Saincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Debate

Climate Change Policy

Deputy Richard Bruton: I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle for the permission to raise this important issue. If present trends continue, by 2050 it will take three planets for nature to replenish the materials we use each year. The take, make, use and dispose model has got an iron grip on the way we live our lives. That has to change. The care of our planet must be at the heart of Ireland 2040. The food we waste each year in Ireland generates the same emissions as 1 million cars. The plastic that wraps our lives so conveniently is rarely used a second time and generates emissions equivalent to half a million cars. Every night, 2 million bedrooms lie empty, in the midst of a housing crisis. All around us, items are used in a throwaway fashion: non-repairable, rapid obsolescence. Two thirds of what goes into our black bins already have better uses available for those who put them in those bins.

The clue to how we might change this is revealed in the fact that 80% of the environmental damage in the items we use is baked in at design stage, both in the products we use, and the markets in which they trade. If we rethink our choices and our supply chain, we can have different outcomes. For many consumers, the choice to purchase, use and re-use these items in a manner consistent with the principles of circular economy is not being made available to them.

I welcome today's publication of a waste Bill. However, we need to go a great deal further than what is envisaged in that Bill. I have set out in a report that I have presented to the Committee on Environment and Climate Action an approach to which we can deliver much more ambition. It is built around five pillars for action. The first of those is in the investment world: both the public investment world and the private. We need to follow the EU so-called taxonomy, in other words, building principles of sustainability into the investments we make. The second pillar is among designers and manufacturers. We must make sure that the designs that are made at that early stage include sustainability. The third pillar is around packaging and labelling. At the moment, we have complete ambiguity and confusion in respect of the labels that are presented. That needs to change. The fourth pillar is to offer new options to consumers, through distribution and retail chains. The final is to develop new consumer markets that can ensure access to accurate information and options for more sustainable practice.

The reality is that even with the publication of the waste Bill yesterday, little of this territory has been developed in Ireland. We do not see in either the public sector or the private sector the sort of commitments to those investment and design strategies. I urge the Minister of State to do a number of things. He needs to set targets, he needs to develop concrete actions and he needs to establish indicators that are reported regularly. For example, we have been talking about green procurement for years but we do not have one single consistent indicator of what progress is being made under green procurement. That is just one example of how we can demonstrate that we are making progress.

I would say to the Minister of State that this cannot be done without a budget. We need to see a substantial budget to ensure that sectoral roadmaps can be opened up in areas like food, construction and retail, where there are huge opportunities to change that pattern, for the benefit of our planet.

Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications

(Deputy Ossian Smyth): I sincerely thank the Deputy for raising this issue. I welcome any Deputy who wants me to go further on my existing policy and who is looking for more ambition. Even better is suggesting ways that I can do that and specific practical means to get there and even better if a Deputy has specific experience in that area and was previously a Minister. The work that the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications, Deputy Eamon Ryan, and I are doing is based on the policy and the preparatory work that Deputy Bruton put in when he was in that role. I hope that future Ministers will implement things where I have done preparatory work.

The Government recognises that Ireland needs to establish a circular economy to achieve its climate action ambitions. It is with that in mind that the heads of the new circular economy Bill were agreed by the Cabinet yesterday. In September 2020, the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications, Deputy Eamon Ryan, launched a new action plan for a circular economy. The action plan goes beyond waste management. It looks at resource use more broadly to capture and maximise the ongoing value of materials that in the past have been discarded. The plan confirmed the link between the circular economy and climate action. It established a circular economy division within my Department, with a mandate to ensure a whole-of-government approach. That division has produced a draft whole-of-government circular economy strategy, which has just finished an eight-week public consultation.

I understand that Deputy Bruton is anxious for what he regards as more ambition in the current draft strategy. I can assure him that there is plenty of ambition behind the strategy and the work programme to follow. If we are to achieve the systemic overhaul that is required, then we need to bring a large number of people with us. We need comprehensive buy-in to transition into a circular economy. That means across Government, business, households and communities. Therefore, targets, actions and timelines must be built with the input of those who are expected to make the changes required. Without collaboration and consensus, the strategy risks becoming a top-down to-do list. We need to first establish an agreed platform for action. With that in mind, I will be visiting the Rediscovery Centre in Ballymun, seeing actual community-led groups trying to implement circular economy ideas rather than lofty abstract ideas that are coming from high up.

In line with the approach set out in the waste action plan, the draft strategy is not a target-driven, technically detailed document. Our primary aim is to set out an overall approach to circular economy policy, identify key objectives and indicate the direction of future policy development. An additional aim has been to provide explanatory information which can demystify the circular economy for non-specialist audiences.

The text also contains an explicit commitment to revise the draft strategy on an ongoing basis. This will include introducing targets as policy develops further. An interdepartmental working group will be convened after publication of the strategy to drive this next phase of development. This joined-up approach will ensure that circular economy practices are embedded across Government.

This first iteration of the strategy aims to provide an overall framework for circular economy policy development. Future versions will include specific actions and targets for all Departments and all sectors of the economy. In parallel, the 2021 climate action plan is currently under preparation and treats circular economy as a cross-cutting issue of significant importance. Circular economy actions and principles will be incorporated across the thematic areas of the document, for example, in construction, agriculture and food loss, and enterprise. We are le-

veraging the expertise and resources of others to support our ambition for the circular economy.

The Environmental Protection Agency's new programme will be a driving force for Ireland's move to a circular economy through designing out waste, promoting resource recycling and delivering sustainable economic growth. The overall approach is to influence behavioural change, support sustainable choices and inform policy toward the implementation of a circular economy.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I do not doubt the Minister of State's commitment in this area. However, I am not convinced by his statement that this will be an overall approach and principled document. We need to make this a central spine of the climate action plan. We need to have very clear targets, some of which need to be new. The Minister of State has certainly adopted halving of food waste, but what about removing all plastic from incineration or landfill by a certain date? How about doubling the size of the reuse sector? Those sorts of changes will require concrete actions. To say that this will be a high principled document and that concrete actions will come later will sell us short.

We can have very concrete actions, for example, banning the "best before" or "sell buy" labels on food. That would be a very practical change that would suddenly change the extent to which we waste food or people are encouraged to waste food. A requirement that 20% of floor space in larger supermarkets be set aside for people who bring their own containers would be a very concrete change to reduce the amount of plastic that is discarded and used only once.

Those actions are needed and we need a concrete budget. I believe the allocation to the circular economy initiated recently was €250,000. Given that we are looking to every section in the economy to develop a roadmap to change the way it designs and manage markets, that is only a drop in the ocean. Most of all, the Government needs to establish indicators. Successive Governments have talked about green procurement, but without any concrete indicators. We need to recognise that such an approach can be considerably less adversarial than some of the debate we have on emission targets alone. I think people instinctively understand we should be sharing and reusing. I urge the Minister of State to make this an essential spine of the climate strategy.

Deputy Ossian Smyth: The circular economy idea reflects a complete change of mindset. I believe the Deputy, as an economist, will recognise we are completely changing the way we think about how our economy works. We started with the idea of taking things out of the ground, constructing things out of them and then throwing them away in a field or alternatively setting them on fire and putting their elements back into the atmosphere. To move away from that idea of take, make and dispose and to move towards this new idea that we can keep resources within the economy, that we can be richer without consumption and that exhausting our finite resources as quickly as possible is not a smart idea or a way to discover prosperity for society represents an enormous change in the way people think about things.

I believe it is right to get people to buy into that change before we move to the metrics. However, the Deputy is right; we cannot manage something unless we measure it. We need key metrics and targets that are very clear and understandable. The Deputy has made a good suggestion to eliminate "best before" and "sell by" dates. That is something that can be considered. We also need to have very clear targets, such as halving something or doubling something. That is absolutely right and we will be moving quickly towards that. The first stage is to convince people that it makes sense to retain resources within society. I think we are winning that argu-

ment and getting people on that side. We are also doing that at a European level. We are getting away from the idea that the quicker people ruin something or use something, the richer everybody is. We need to move away from planned obsolescence. It is a design problem and design problems are difficult to cope with. Our pharmaceutical and IT sectors have done very well in design and have very skilled people. We are a knowledge economy and we can conquer this.

Health Services

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: I raise the issue of children who are suffering with chronic pain and their families. In November 2019, the only HSE paediatric pain specialist left his post due to a continued lack of support and an intense and increasing workload. As a result, no pain paediatric specialists are left. There are also currently no private pain consultants in the country who see children. Therefore, children throughout the State who suffer from many different chronic pain conditions have been left with no one to help them.

This has forced some parents, out of pure desperation, to seek care for their children abroad at great personal expense in addition to the enormous stress of travelling with a child who is experiencing chronic pain. However, even this avenue to care has now been halted due to the pandemic. Out of desperation, these parents have banded together to protest over the treatment of their children and to fight to secure proper and timely care. This campaigning resulted in many parliamentary questions being asked and multiple media articles being released.

Under pressure to respond to this public outcry, funding was granted in December 2019 for two part-time pain consultant specialist roles and a full multidisciplinary team. This team was to consist of advanced nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, a physiotherapist, an occupational therapist and, importantly, a psychologist. The parents knew it would take time to set up such a team. Therefore, they continued to advocate on behalf of their children for an interim measure to fill the gap in pain care until the full team was in place.

It was agreed that an interim measure would be put in place, whereby a pain consultant from the North was to be contracted on a temporary basis. Many parents were happy with this measure because at this stage their children were truly suffering unbearable pain as they had been without professional care for months and some for even over a year. However, others were not because this interim measure only extended to some, not all, of the children already in the system. No new referrals were being accepted until the full team, including the consultant roles, was in place. This is the case to date and none of these children has been accepted onto a waiting list. That is totally unacceptable and extremely concerning for the children and their families.

The recruitment process for the multidisciplinary team took well over a year to come to fruition. At the end of January 2021, parent advocates were informed that the advanced nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists and physiotherapist had been recruited and were in place. The parent advocacy group has informed me that a consultant has been seeing patients within the last couple of weeks. However, they are concerned that there is only one consultant in the position. I ask the Minister of State to clarify if this is the case. Parents' fear is that if there is only one replacement consultant, history could repeat itself.

The parents are also concerned that appointments will only be on the basis of consultant referral. For children with rheumatology-related pain, there is a four or five-year waiting list

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to see a rheumatology consultant. Children will be waiting for that and then to be referred, meaning they could be waiting a very long time just to see the pain consultant when they are in chronic pain.

Can the Minister of State advise if these services are only offered on a 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. basis, as parents have concerns about the status of out-of-hours services? They are also concerned that the pain relief outpatient waiting list reports, which are listed on the National Treatment Purchase Fund website, underestimate the actual size of the list and, thus, waiting times. In summary, is only one consultant in place and will a second one be hired? Will the team be operating on a nine-to-five basis? Can the Minister of State clarify the situation with the waiting lists and address the concerns parents have in that regard?

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Frankie Feighan): I thank the Deputy for raising the issue and welcome the opportunity to address the Dáil on behalf of the Minister for Health, Deputy Stephen Donnelly, on this important topic. I assure the House that Children's Health Ireland, CHI, is very aware that issues with the complex pain management service have been the cause of anxiety and upset for parents and children. Funding has been provided to address this issue and most posts have been recruited.

As the Deputy may be aware, the background to this issue is that a consultant in complex pain management in CHI resigned at the end of 2019. It is a highly specialised position and the service has evolved on an *ad hoc* basis since then. It was recognised there was a need to put in place a more structured model to manage the needs of patients with complex pain to ensure outcomes and alignment with best practice internationally. Funding was provided to do that and this provided for a number of key posts as part of the development of the service.

The model of care for paediatric anaesthesia developed by the national clinical programme for anaesthesia and endorsed by the Irish paediatric anaesthesia network provides guidelines for the organisational structure and best practice model for a paediatric pain management service. CHI has been in the process of developing the structure for this model and key posts are now in place. This interdisciplinary service consists of a whole-time equivalent consultant with special interest in pain management, a clinical nurse specialist, 1.2 whole-time equivalent advanced nurse practitioners, an occupational therapist, a physiotherapist and a psychologist.

Children's Health Ireland has advised that all posts are in place except the consultant position. Unfortunately, recruitment for this post has so far been unsuccessful and is ongoing. The post was advertised last year but did not attract candidates. It is being redesigned to structure it slightly differently and it is hoped the way it has been configured will now attract suitable candidates. In the interim, CHI advises that a locum consultant has been put in place until such time as the permanent consultant position is filled.

CHI has confirmed all service users have access to the clinical nurse specialist and advanced nurse practitioners, who are available to address urgent queries under the governance of the pain consultant. Contact details have been provided to service users by the CHI.

The new service will provide a biopsychological approach to pain rehabilitation, in keeping with evidence-based treatments that are recognised globally. CHI has advised that the new model of care will be fully in place prior to the end of the second quarter of this year and service users will be contacted with appointments. I reassure patients that the Minister is committed to ensuring children have access to this crucial service and the Department of Health will continue

to work closely with the HSE and CHI in this regard.

The Deputy asked about a nine-to-five service, consultant referrals and the out-of-hours service. I will raise that directly with the Minister if the Deputy sends me an email.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: I thank the Minister of State and I will send that in an email. I understand there is funding in place and it is good we have clarity that there is a locum consultant and that amendments will be made in an effort to hire a full-time consultant, which it is hoped will attract more candidates. How long will that process take? When does the Minister of State expect it to close in order that the waiting lists can be dealt with? I understand there is a locum consultant but children have been waiting 18 months. They have had no amendments to their pain management. It has been a few weeks since that locum consultant was put in place and they have not heard anything since. That needs to be looked at.

I am concerned about those children who have to wait four or five years to see one consultant in order to then get another consultant. I think we all agree that to see children in chronic pain and parents not to be able to give them the help they need is really distressing and has a huge impact on the children's lives. We need to do everything we can in regard to chronic pain in children. I welcome the opportunity to speak to the Minister of State on this. We must do everything we can to put everything in place to help these children. I imagine we are all on the same wavelength on this.

I will follow up with those specific questions in an email to the Minister of State. If he comes back we can push this forward in order that children in chronic pain can get the help they need.

Deputy Frankie Feighan: I thank the Deputy again for raising this issue, for her awareness of it and her understanding that it is a particularly challenging time for the health system, which has experienced severe pressure from the impact of Covid, exacerbated by the ransomware attack.

It is important to put on the record the enormous efforts of all staff at this time. The Department of Health does not have full access to information on the impact of the ransomware attack on waiting lists but will provide an update as soon as one is available. According to the most recent information available, as of 13 May, there were 29 children on CHI's outpatient lists waiting for a pain relief appointment. Notwithstanding the challenges, I know CHI's priority is to ensure a sustainable pain management service is in place to meet the needs of all children.

CHI has advised it is intended that the new model of care would be in place by the end of this month. It also has confirmed that its pain team has been engaging with all patients using the service and that all new and existing service users have been informed of the change of service model. I understand the engagement with service users has included a questionnaire, which will help the service to triage patients. CHI has advised patients are being actively triaged. During this time, CHI has confirmed that all service users have access to the clinical nurse specialists and advanced nurse practitioners who are available to address urgent queries under the governance of the pain consultant. Service users will be contacted with appointments once the new model of care is in place.

I look forward to the Deputy's email and I will pass it on to the Minister and get the answers the Deputy seeks.

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Prison Service

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I thank the Minister of State for coming into the House to listen to what I have to say. We have all found the past 15 months to be difficult. Those who could not get out and about and older people confined to their homes found it particularly so. We have to try to imagine what it is like to be locked up in prison during that period. Every small freedom left to inmates in prison had to be curtailed. During that period, there were virtually no prison visits, and what visits that did take place within the short windows when they were allowed were very constrained in time and numbers.

I commend the Prison Service, prison staff and prisoners on the huge co-operation in ensuring there was a minimal amount of Covid in our prison system. That was a huge achievement which came at huge personal cost, particularly to prisoners, in terms of the limited opportunities they have in prison. Video visits were good, but we have all found that the Zoom meeting is no substitute for in-person meetings. We need to take a humane view of where we are now.

Belatedly, vaccines are being rolled out across the board in prisons. The process in this regard needs to be completed expeditiously. We need to look at the issue of families' visits. We need to be generous in what we do and to balance the psychological rights and the general well-being of people with the other risk factors we know are there. Of course, the large number of parents of prisoners who have been vaccinated is a big help on this road. We need as expeditious a reopening of prison visits as possible. We need immediately to hear firm dates for when this is going to happen and to be generous in regard to the modalities, that is, the length of visits, the number of people who can visit and so on. I point out how successfully we reopened nursing homes to visitors a considerable time ago. The people in the nursing home cohort are generally much more vulnerable than members of the prison population.

I was disappointed to hear last week that religious services have not recommenced in prisons in the same way that they have in the outside world. I cannot understand this because religious services are important to those who wish to attend them. Obviously, because it is a prison environment, religious services must take place in a very controlled atmosphere. It is absolutely necessary that an announcement be made today that religious services will be made available once again, irrespective of faith, as they were pre Covid.

Deputy Frankie Feighan: The Irish Prison Service fully appreciates how important religious services and contact with family and friends are to people in custody. The Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Deputy Hildegard Naughton, wishes to assure the Deputy that the Government is committed to the return of both as soon as it is considered safe to do so. The Deputy is correct to say there have been more than 15 months of difficulty. It is very difficult to be locked up, curtailed and constrained. As he noted, we need to balance the psychological rights with other rights. It is a difficult time for all.

As the Deputy may be aware, at the start of the pandemic, the Prison Service introduced a video visit system, which has allowed families to continue to support those in custody. Additional phone calls were also facilitated. I understand from the Minister of State that feedback on the use of this system has been generally positive. Nevertheless, I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the service is developing a new framework for the unwinding of prison restrictions, informed by the recent Government plan for reopening society, Resilience and Recovery: The Path Ahead. The new framework, which will be published later this month by the Prison Service, will set out a phased unwinding of the restrictions and a plan for the resumption of

visits and religious services will be included. Although the unwinding of prison restrictions and the resumption of religious services and visits are priorities for the service, they are subject to a number of critical factors, including the need to maintain infection control measures, the roll-out of the prison vaccination programme for both prisoners and staff, which the Deputy mentioned, and the roll-out of the community vaccination programme.

The Deputy will appreciate that when the service is reviewing the unwinding of restrictions, it must take into account the risks of Covid transmission in congregated settings and the fact that a large cohort of those in custody and staff working in prisons have not been vaccinated. It is good to see, as was mentioned, that vaccinations are being ramped up. I hope vaccinations will begin to happen much more quickly. Revised guidelines and controls for the safe celebration of religious services have been developed and approved, and chaplains have continued to work in all prison establishments during lockdowns, providing important spiritual and pastoral support services. A date for the resumption of religious services and in-person visits will be agreed as part of the wider plan for unwinding Covid-19 restrictions in prisons later this month. When this has been finalised, it will be communicated widely.

I hope this clarifies the current circumstances for the Deputy. As he noted, prisons are facing many issues that need to be dealt with.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: On a number of fronts, I am very disappointed with the reply. As I said, the roll-out of the vaccine in prisons has been deferred, even though, as the Minister of State pointed out, they are congregated settings. The greatest risk has always been that, inadvertently, the virus would be allowed to enter prisons through people who come to prisons every day providing services, including prison staff and the people who provide all the other services within prisons, many of which were curtailed during the lockdowns. I would hope that now that the vaccines have started being rolled out, that would be seen through to completion, expeditiously, for every person in prison who wants a vaccine and also for prison staff. Anything else would be unsatisfactory.

Allowing for that, I pointed out a model whereby there was a much better practice and a much more expeditious reopening of visits, namely, that relating to nursing homes, which, in the main, involved the older cohort of society whose members are very vulnerable. We knew that statistically and still we were able to reopen visits reasonably soon after vaccination. Do not tell me, after all these months, that we are drawing up another plan. I do not want to hear about another big master plan being drawn up. It is most frustrating. Prisoners want dates on which they are going to be able to see their loved ones, and their loved ones want dates on which they can see the members of their families in prison. It should not be the case that it might happen at some point in the future on a phased basis. That is not good enough.

Similarly, there is no excuse for not facilitating religious services. We all know how safe they have been in the general populace and how controlled that environment is. There is no reason not to facilitate them. It is totally unfair to put an additional burden of caution on prisons when in society, we balance the other human needs of people in a much fairer way.

Deputy Frankie Feighan: I am pleased to inform the Deputy that a vaccination programme commenced on 9 June on a prison-by-prison basis, with vaccinations administered by the National Ambulance Service, supported by the Irish Prison Service healthcare teams, to all prisoners and unvaccinated staff under 40 years of age. The Minister of State understands that this has been a very difficult time for prisoners and their families. I understand the impact the loss

of family contact has had on prisoners.

The Deputy mentioned nursing homes. My mother is resident in a nursing home and we have had the same issues. It has been reassuring to see them reopen but there remain difficulties in regard to visits.

The Irish Prison Service has worked tirelessly to safeguard prisoners and staff, and this continues to be the primary consideration. It must continue to ensure the prison population is protected from the virus and it is continuing to make use of alternative means of keeping prisoners and their families connected. It is the intention that the Prison Service retain the use of video visits post Covid, so families will have the option of video or physical visits, which will be beneficial to families, especially those who need to travel long distances.

The Minister for Justice has asked me to reassure the Deputy that the new framework for unwinding prison restrictions, which, as I said, will be published later this month by the Irish Prison Service, will provide clarity for both prisoners and their families as to when visits and religious services can begin again.

Arts Centres

Deputy Marian Harkin: I thank the Minister, Deputy Catherine Martin, for taking this matter. In October last, she hosted a Zoom meeting to consider the matter of core funding for Yeats Society Sligo. At that meeting, attended by the director, Susan O’Keeffe, board members and all the local Deputies, it was clearly outlined to the Minister and her officials the urgent need for core operational funding to keep the society on life support while it planned for and worked towards a post-Covid future.

I do not need to convince the Minister of the immense value of the Yeats Society Sligo. It is more than 60 years old and celebrates the life and legacy of W.B. Yeats, our Nobel prize-winning poet, and his talented family. It is also worth noting that some of the people who set up the society were contemporaries of W.B. Yeats. At that time, they were way ahead of the curve. The society now operates the longest running international literary school in the world. It is running its summer school online this year. It has promoted Yeats, Sligo and Ireland to many generations of international summer school students and has significantly helped in consolidating his reputation as a global literary genius, which, in turn, greatly enhances Ireland’s cultural standing.

As already stated, the Minister and her Department know all of this. They also know that the Yeats Society Sligo will close its doors at the end of September this year due to a lack of revenue unless core operational funding is sourced. The society cannot be just another casualty of Covid. We are talking about a reasonable amount of money to keep the doors open as the society begins to move towards a post-Covid future. In 2019, the society had 13,000 visitors and was on target for 16,000 in 2020. These visitors generated its revenue. The society was, and is, in profit but it now needs assistance. It has a small number of staff who worked really hard to create a vibrant cultural institution that contributes to the economy of Sligo and, crucially, helps to keep Sligo and Ireland right up there in the international artistic realm. One volunteer committee after another has fought hard for this for over 60 years but it is now in danger of being lost, just as the society is planning for the centenary of Yeats’s Nobel prize in 2023. It is worth quoting the citation of the Nobel committee when awarding to W.B. Yeats. It said the

award was: “for his always inspired poetry, which in a highly artistic form gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation.”

Once again, I say that we cannot lose this or put it at risk. The question that I and the Yeats Society Ireland put to the Government is why does it not see fit to fund the work of a small charity which has an international reputation and which supports the national poet? I am not saying the Minister has completely turned her back on the society because she has not. The society has received grants, but they are project grants. They do not provide the operational funding that would allow the society to keep the doors open. I ask the Minister for core operational funding.

Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media (Deputy Catherine Martin): I am very much aware of the situation regarding the Yeats Society Sligo. Officials in my Department have been in regular communication with this organisation. As the Deputy has pointed out, the society has been in existence for 61 years and runs the long-standing and well-recognised annual Yeats summer school, which reaches out to students and lecturers in universities in major cities across the globe. Outside of this, the society runs a permanent Yeats exhibition, offers talks to visitors, locals and schools, and runs poetry events and creative writing and visual art classes for young and old.

As the Deputy mentioned, we, and other local Deputies, met with the Yeats Society Sligo last October. I wish to acknowledge the Deputy’s strong advocacy and support for the arts in Ireland, and the Yeats Society Sligo. I subsequently received a request for annual funding required by the society to meet salary and operational costs. While it is challenging to consider entering into a new annual arrangement with any cultural body until the 2022 budget is decided, I will certainly be very mindful of the request in that context.

In the interim, I wish to inform the House that, in 2019, the society was awarded the maximum grant of €5,000 under the 2019 small local festival and summer schools scheme towards the annual Yeats summer school. Some 600 attendees participated across the nine-day event in 2019. No application was received from the society for this scheme in 2020. The results of the 2021 small local festival and summer schools scheme will be announced later this week, but I am happy to inform the House that, once again, the maximum grant of €5,000 will be awarded to the Yeats Society Sligo for its 2021 summer school. This is one of 28 projects awarded funding under the 2021 scheme, which has a total allocation of €96,391.

In addition, prior to the meeting in October, the Yeats Society Sligo was awarded the maximum grant of €20,000 under the audience re-engagement scheme for small, regional and specialised museums, which was a once-off scheme as part of my Department’s response to the Covid-19 situation. The society has also applied under stream A of my Department’s cultural capital scheme for 2019 to 2022 for building upgrades and a dedicated writers’ room. The results of the application process relating to this scheme will be announced in the coming weeks.

On the wider matter, my Department provides annual funding to the National Library of Ireland, NLI, which houses the largest and most extensive W.B. Yeats collection anywhere in the world. The NLI also has a permanent Yeats exhibition, originally opened in 2006, which has since welcomed more than 1 million visitors. The significance and celebration of Yeats as one of the great giants of Irish and global literature is very much alive and the Department continues to have a core role in the preservation, display and dissemination of his work through institutions such as the NLI.

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With regard to the Yeats Society Sligo's request, I have asked officials in my Department to assess the society's submission in the context of the 2022 budget. The provision of any funding would be in the context of an agreed strategy, possibly involving the local authority and other interests, with a timeframe and performance indicators for assessment of value in due course.

Deputy Marian Harkin: I thank the Minister for her comprehensive reply, from which it is clear that she is actively engaging with the Yeats Society Sligo, which I know, and that she and her Department are putting serious thought into this matter. It is always valuable to get a response from a Minister that shows that he or she is engaging rather than simply reading out a prepared speech. In many ways, the Minister made a better case for the Yeats Society Sligo than I did in my four minutes. I am pleased to hear that she is minded to consider an application for funding. She mentioned the small local festivals and summer schools scheme and that the society will get €5,000 when the results of this are announced in the near future. Everything helps but the Minister and I know that this organisation is in serious financial trouble because of Covid. This is not the only organisation affected but it is the one we are discussing today. The society's accountants have said that it will have to close its doors by the end of September unless funding is found. The Minister mentioned other streams of funding. These are again very valuable and very appreciated but they relate to capital funding and will not help to open the doors in the morning and close them at night, to pay for electricity or insurance or to maintain the website, apps and so on. I understand that it is difficult to find a mechanism to provide core funding for the society but the Minister and I know that, where there is a will, there is a way. Covid has shown us that we can take exceptional measures. Having heard the Minister's response this morning, I am hopeful that a way will be found.

Deputy Catherine Martin: I thank the Deputy. I acknowledge the tremendous commitment of the many people involved in ensuring popular recognition and appreciation of the life and work of W.B. Yeats. More than any other figure, he personified the Irish cultural revival and informs our understanding of a revolutionary transformation of Ireland. The greatest among our literary figures of the age, Yeats is acknowledged in libraries, exhibitions, seminars, literary studies and monuments at home and abroad. It is of great importance that his genius be carried forward across the generations. I offer my thanks and encouragement to all of those who are engaged in the celebration and promotion of his achievement, including the Yeats Society Sligo.

It is appropriate that Yeats be remembered and honoured in Sligo and that students and admirers of Yeats have the opportunity to peruse themed exhibits and visit the tranquil and beautiful area that he found so inspirational and with which I am quite familiar. I greatly respect the work of the Yeats Society over its many years of dedicated interest and hope that it will be continued. I am particularly conscious that recent times have had unprecedented challenges for its programmes since constraints on travel and gathering have been in effect. I assure the Deputy and the House of my interest in contributing to a sustainable future for the centre operated by the Yeats Society. I have asked officials in my Department to meet the society as soon as possible to explore options for the future sustainable operation of the society. I thank the Deputy for her interest in this matter.

10 o'clock

Acquisition of Development Land (Assessment of Compensation) Bill 2021: Second Stage [Private Members]

Deputy Alan Kelly: I move: “That the Bill be now read a Second Time.”

I wish to share time with my colleague, Deputy Howlin. More than 50 years ago, in the late 1960s, amid concerns about the high cost of housing for home buyers, a situation which has repeated itself several times since, the then Fianna Fáil Minister for Local Government, the late Bobby Molloy, commissioned a report on ways to tackle the supply of development land. A High Court judge, Mr. Justice John Kenny, was appointed to lead the committee established to examine the issue. Its report, the Kenny report, was published in 1973, 48 years ago. It contained a set of radical recommendations to help solve Ireland’s housing problems and should be commended. It is a report that has been talked about ever since but despite all of the chaos and disaster which property has created for Irish people in the time since 1973, it has never been implemented.

We stand in Dáil Éireann in 2021, at least two generations after the report was published, in the middle of yet another housing crisis. In the time since 1973, we have had housing crisis after housing crisis, including a calamitous economic collapse in which property development and speculation, facilitated by multiple Fianna Fáil Governments and not regulated by the banks, bankrupted the country. We have had numerous tribunals and scandals, costing hundreds of millions of euro, and all too many criminal cases about corruption and rezoning in the planning process. They have all passed and the Kenny report still has not been implemented.

The housing crisis is worse than ever before. We have thousands of homeless people, extortionate rents, increasing house prices, a lack of housing supply and a generation of young people locked out of home ownership. All the while, there is rampant hoarding of development land again and again. Land speculation is rife. The victims of this crisis number in the hundreds of thousands.

Instead of continuously shouting at one another, I ask Deputies when we will act collectively to make this stop. What will it take to end Ireland’s dysfunctional property market? After a century of independence, economic collapse and housing crisis after housing crisis, when will Ireland finally have a functioning housing system? I will tell the House the answer. It will be solved when this House has the guts to take on the vested interests, landowners and property speculators who have rigged the housing system in their favour, facilitated by this House. It will stop when Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael stop kowtowing to massive land hoarders, investment funds and speculators and, for once in their political lives, do more to help renters, first-time buyers and families.

As many economic commentators have said, land is at the centre of the housing crisis. Many of the problems we now face could have been avoided if the Kenny report had been implemented. The recommendation is simple but effective. It is that local authorities be given the power to do a compulsory purchase of land at its existing use value plus a 25% gratuity. This measure, which has been opposed by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael for generations, would immediately have ended the ability of land hoarders and speculators to make enormous profits at the expense of first-time buyers. It would have effectively ended land hoarding as a practice. If it had been implemented, there may never have been a property bubble and collapse, nor a housing crisis or anything like the scale of the crisis that exists today.

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The people who should be at the forefront of the Government's mind, but who clearly are not, are the victims of this current crisis. They are those paying extortionate rents, experiencing or living with the threat of eviction and homelessness, people forced to move back in with their parents rather than find their own home, and the entire generation of young people who have been condemned to spending enormous shares of their income on housing. Behind each and every number in the housing and homelessness statistics, there is a human story of pain and hurt and, in many cases, trauma, as a result of this man-made disaster.

The ideologues in Fianna Fáil and particularly Fine Gael who worship at the altar of the market and believe the market will sort out all problems have been found to be wrong time and again, with disastrous results for our country and generations of Irish citizens. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael's approach has demonstrably and repeatedly failed to build housing for citizens in the right place, at the right price and in the right quantity. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael like to pretend that the housing crisis is out of their hands and is something akin to a natural disaster or an act of God. This is complete rubbish. The housing crisis is as bad as it is as a direct result of the political and policy decisions made by both parties.

Nobody in this Chamber could argue with the fact that our housing system is simply disastrous. Ireland's housing crisis is out of control and there is, without question, a need and public demand for radical action. That is what we are doing today. We are taking real radical action, finally grasping this nettle and pushing for radical change.

For the third time in our history, we are bringing this legislation before the Dáil. People may ask about the practical effects of this Bill so I will go through it. The Real Cost of New Housing Delivery 2020, a report by the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland, SCSi, published in August last year, estimates that the land component of a newly-built house in the greater Dublin area is €53,000 per house, which represents 16% of the final cost of the house. Based on these figures and agricultural land values from the Institute of Professional Auctioneers and Valuers, IPAV, and the Central Statistics Office, CSO, taking into account current planning density guidelines of between 35 and 50 units per hectare, we estimate that, if implemented, this Bill will reduce the cost of a new-build, three-bedroom semi-detached house built on a greenfield site in the greater Dublin area by approximately €30,000. This would not be a silver bullet to the housing crisis, but it would finally be a major step in the right direction that has a substantial practical impact on prices.

By finally implementing the Kenny report, which has been blocked by Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil for 48 years, a length of time which is hard to believe, this Bill will effectively eliminate the ability of land speculators to pocket enormous profits. We have also seen a senior counsel's legal opinion, which we commissioned, that this legislation is completely constitutional. I know it is completely constitutional. It also needs to be said that the ninth report of the All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution in 2003 also found that implementation of the Kenny report was constitutional. Let us not hear any of that rubbish today.

For legal reasons, there needs to be a grandfather effect included in the legislation, which means it will effectively only apply to land bought in the future. Remember that there is never a wrong time to do the right thing. There is no excuse for delay. To paraphrase a Chinese proverb on the best time to plant a tree, the best time to implement the Kenny report was 1973. The second best time is now.

The Labour Party is not alone in having voiced support for implementation of the Kenny

report. The Green Party - I note the Minister of State is here today - has for decades called for the implementation of the Kenny report. In 2004, Ciarán Cuffe, now a Green Party MEP, said, "The Kenny report on the price of building land back in the early 1970s made some great proposals, but they weren't acted on", and they should have been. He is absolutely right. It will be interesting to see if, on the floor of the Dáil today, the Green Party, which is now in government, will follow what we are pushing and support this commitment of which it has long been supportive.

The Green Party is not alone on the Government benches in having voiced support for the implementation of the Kenny report. In 2018, no less a figure than the Taoiseach, Deputy Micheál Martin, said the following:

I think implementing Kenny is morally the right thing to do - I don't think there should be windfall profits once land is rezoned but it would also undoubtedly reduce the cost of housing because the price of land at the moment is a significant factor in increasing the price of houses.

That was what the Taoiseach said, so surely he and the Government are going to support the Bill. The Taoiseach was right: the Kenny report should be implemented. As Taoiseach, he has the opportunity to do the right thing morally, as he said in 2018, and to implement the Kenny report. If he fails to do so, given what he has said, his own morality and what he said in 2018 will be called into question.

Many other bodies have recommended the implementation of the Kenny report, including the National Economic and Social Council, which only recently concluded that the core principles of the Kenny report remain as relevant today as they were in 1973. This Bill is not a panacea, but it will be a major step in the right direction, and will force land hoarders and speculators to start building housing on the sites which they have acquired, or to sell them to somebody who will. That, in itself, will release more development land and reduce prices.

In addressing the housing crisis, there is much more that needs to be done. We also need action to protect renters, by freezing rents, which we all know can be done. We must build tens of thousands of social and affordable housing units and stop investment funds from gazumping first-time buyers. These are all political choices that the Government must address. This Bill is also something it must address. Given how serious the housing situation is - the skyrocketing rents, the endless homelessness crisis, and all the other dysfunctions in our housing system - surely the time is right for radical action. The time is right to implement the Kenny report, once and for all. I ask all Deputies across the political spectrum to support the Bill. Failure to do so will mean that they lack the will to solve the housing crisis.

Deputy Brendan Howlin: The issue of housing as a right has been debated many times in Dáil and Seanad Éireann. The right to secure shelter of a decent standard is generally accepted by Members of these Houses to be a human right on a par with the right to bodily integrity and access to healthcare or education, but it is a right which this Republic has not delivered upon, despite any number of policy initiatives, programme for Government commitments and White Papers. We could plaster a house with such documents. The Labour Party believes that there is now a consensus, a majority if not an overwhelming majority in this House, on agreeing to the proposal that we must find a policy platform that will finally deliver affordable and social housing at a volume and a cost that will address and resolve the housing issue once and for all, but we also need the policy tools to do the job.

For as long as I have been in politics, whenever housing policy was debated, mention was made of the Kenny report of 1973. The committee, chaired by Mr. Justice John Kenny, which produced that report was set up to consider measures for controlling the price of building land for the common good. The committee was also asked to suggest possible measures to ensure that the so-called betterment increase in land values that accrued as a result of planning decisions or the provision of water or sewerage by the local authority and the State shall not be secured for the benefit of individuals but for the community. The committee was initiated because of the disproportionate rise in the price of building land in the years up to 1973, which, as the leader of the Labour Party has said, was two generations ago. The windfall profit, which benefits landowners, simply because of a land rezoning, servicing or a planning decision, does nothing to change the intrinsic nature of the land but monumentally increases its value and that is an issue that cries out to be addressed. The majority of the Kenny committee proposed the creation of designated areas for housing. The local authorities could outline what they plan to do in the next five or ten years and purchase those lands compulsorily at agricultural values plus 25%. Those lands, once in public ownership, could be developed directly by the local authority concerned or in co-operation with private developers. That is what the overwhelming majority of the committee that produced the Kenny report suggested in 1973.

The line of tension between this eminently sensible proposal and the assertion of constitutional property rights has emerged every time this issue has been discussed. The rights to private property are set out in Article 43.1 of the Constitution, which states:

1° The State acknowledges that man, in virtue of his rational being, has the natural right, antecedent to positive law, to the private ownership of external goods.

2° The State accordingly guarantees to pass no law attempting to abolish the right of private ownership or the general right to transfer, bequeath, and inherit property.

That oft quoted property right is modified significantly in further articles. Article 43.2 states:

1° The State recognises, however, that the exercise of the rights mentioned in the foregoing provisions of this Article ought, in civil society, to be regulated by the principles of social justice.

2° The State, accordingly, may as occasion requires delimit by law the exercise of the said rights with a view to reconciling their exercise with the exigencies of the common good.

From the creation of the Constitution, the right to property was always intended to be modified by the common good and we must assert that now. Even jurisprudence has changed, and the view of the Supreme Court has changed over the years. The absolute right that is now reflected in decisions made not only in our domestic courts but in European courts underpin the societal importance of the common good.

The State has attempted various approaches to capture back for the public the betterment value of the decisions relating to land in order to achieve the goal of enabling the average person and the average family on the average income to buy and own their own home. Proposals have come in various Bills and Acts to reserve a percentage of developments for social and affordable housing. That remains the approach today. All measures are tested against these constitutional provisions and by the European Convention on Human Rights and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Various challenges have been made through the years.

We come to our proposal today, which is fundamentally to go back to basics. I refer to the right to compulsorily purchase land for housing at existing value plus 25%. We must ensure that local authorities are fully engaged in the business of house building and housing supply. That used to be the way. Local authorities had significant housing units engaged in land acquisition, advance planning and servicing years' worth of projected need. Some had direct building units and built housing themselves or worked closely with local builders to address upcoming needs. In the noughties, all of that stopped. A decision was made by the Government that hollowed out the planning and housing units of local authorities and housing provision was largely left to the private sector, with local authorities merely becoming another customer for private developers. That was a fundamental and dreadful mistake, but it also changed the mindset and it established in many local authorities a view that they did not have to be part of driving the solution to housing, as once was.

What we are proposing, to make land affordable to build on, must be accompanied by staffing increases in local authorities. Specialised training and resources must also accompany this important measure. This is the Labour Party's third attempt to legislate for the Kenny recommendations. In 1990, my former colleague, Gerry O'Sullivan, introduced the legislation. In 2003, my former party leader, Eamon Gilmore, did so. It was always opposed but I believe we now have a change. I said at the beginning of my contribution that I believe there has been a change of heart and that the proposals rejected down the years can now be accepted. Just as we in the Labour Party have worked to change the minds and votes of parties and individual Deputies on the major social issues down the decades, I believe we can achieve consensus on this issue now.

The purpose of this Bill is simple; it is to remove the unwarranted windfall gain to a landowner who is enriched simply because his land is needed by a community and his fellow citizens as a place to build homes. We would ensure a fair price is paid and, in doing so, make a significant reduction to the price a person needs to pay to provide a home. Ultimately, that proposal benefits everybody in society.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Malcolm Noonan): I move amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after "That" and substitute the following:

"Dáil Éireann, while acknowledging the relevance of the Acquisition of Development Land (Assessment of Compensation) Bill 2021 in regard to securing more cost efficient development land with the objective that all persons insofar as practicable have good quality and affordable housing appropriate to their needs, in accordance with the principles of social justice and the exigencies of the common good, resolves that the Bill be deemed to be read a second time this day 12 months, to allow sufficient time to consider the work of the Law Reform Commission and finalise proposals currently being formulated by the Government, in line with the Programme for Government commitment."

I thank Deputies Kelly and Howlin for introducing this Bill. In summary, it raises an important issue of land value capture for community gain. In essence, it is an opportunity to debate the long-standing question as to how best we can ensure a share of increased land value arising from public policy decisions and investment, including in respect of zoning and the provision of infrastructure, may be acquired for public benefit. While I agree in principle with the aims

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of the Bill and acknowledge it is well intended, I am seeking support to defer its reading for 12 months. My rationale for doing so is very genuine. In the first instance, the Bill is premature with regard to the final report of the Law Reform Commission on the reform and consolidation of compulsory purchase order laws, which is expected before the end of 2021 and which I understand will include a draft compulsory acquisition of land (consolidation and reform) Bill. This will be the culmination of an extensive process that has been ongoing for almost five years. It will be substantive work that will need to be considered.

The Bill is also premature with regard to alternative Government proposals. In this regard, the programme for Government includes a commitment to bring forward proposals for reform in the area of community gain at the land zoning stage of the planning process, work which is now advanced. This will take the form of key flagship measures arising from the forthcoming housing for all strategy and directly related legislative proposals being concurrently formulated as a general scheme of a new legislative proposal.

Like the Deputy, the Government is committed to dealing with this complex and thorny issue. How we tackle the matter needs to be comprehensive but also fair, equitable and proportionate. The Deputy's thinking is not far removed from the Government's position. The difference is in the approach. I will elaborate further on some of the differences but, before doing so, it is important for me to note that the Bill's provisions apply only to housing, with no consideration of infrastructure that may be required to enable housing development. That is a significant limitation. The provisions of Deputy Kelly's Bill are based on the 1973 Kenny report, which proposed the land value capture mechanism whereby designated development lands at the edge of built-up areas could be acquired by the State at existing-use value, generally envisaged as agricultural land value plus 25%, to facilitate the development of housing. Although adopted by the Government at the time, the provisions of the Kenny report were never implemented but have remained a point of reference.

To summarise, the Bill's proposals are to enable local authorities to acquire development land that is transacted after 3 June 2021 and without planning permission at not more than existing-use value plus up to 25%. In other words, it is not to exceed 125%. This is as per the 1973 Kenny proposals although the Kenny report was intended to apply to designated lands. In this regard, the Bill, as drafted, would apply to all "development land". The Bill would apply only to such land transacted after 3 June 2021, meaning the development lands that do not change hands at any stage after that date would not be affected. The Bill would exclude any benefit in respect of land on which there is an extant permission as full development and improvement value plus investment return would remain payable.

There are immediate considerations if the Bill, as currently drafted, were to be enacted. It would be a disincentive to buy or sell development land for the delivery of residential development that could impact housing supply in the short to medium term. It would create uncertainty in the development sector; be disproportionate and discriminate against new entrants to the market and not provide a mechanism for fair or equitable application; and be impractical to apply. The Bill, as drafted, would risk the immediate creation of a two-tier land market as it would give rise to motivation to cease all land transactions in the short to medium term. This is due to the cliff-face nature of the provision whereby there would be no impact on lands transacted before 3 June 2021. Those transacted after that date could lose significant value by comparison to those transacted prior to 3 June 2021. It would serve to remove any motive for a landowner or developer to transact current development land if such a course of action were to result in a near total loss of value, as would be the case in respect of recently zoned agricultural land. In

addition, the Bill, as drafted, in combination with other existing planning provisions, would effectively exclude development lands on which there is an extant planning permission. Current planning extension-of-duration provisions enable existing planning permissions to be extended for up to five years.

It is possible for a landowner with a site acquired prior to 3 June 2021 to seek an extended period of planning permission, for example, ten years. These provisions would enable those with current permissions or no intention of transacting land to effectively hoard land with planning permission. The provisions of the Bill would therefore act as a barrier to any new entrants to the development market.

It is also relevant that there were an estimated 70,000 to 80,000 unimplemented permissions for residential units at the end of 2020, with 42,000 in Dublin alone. The Bill could result in a premium value in respect of unaffected lands benefiting from an extant planning permission, causing the value of sites with unimplemented permissions, especially those with permissions of remaining long duration, to increase. This could slow the output of housing in the short to medium term when rapid acceleration is required.

While the Kenny report has remained a point of reference, there are critical differences between now and when it was completed. For example, housing was delivered differently and in a much less complex operating environment, with less onerous procurement and tendering rules, which would have enabled the timely development or disposal of any lands acquired for housing purposes as recommended in the report. Moreover, at that time, the dominant form of development was low-density, suburban expansion. Extensive greenfield development sites were available as cities were relatively smaller and distances were shorter. Almost 50 years later, there is a much greater need to facilitate higher density brownfield and transport-led urban development to develop more sustainably in the face of climate change while improving both quality of life and competitiveness.

The emerging measures being developed in our Department, in the context of the housing for all strategy, are intended to be more practical, equitable and proportionate proposals for community gain related to the land zoning process that seek to balance the needs for land, infrastructure and affordable housing while at the same time taking into account the rights of private landowners, having regard to the overall benefit to society. I am confident that the proposals that will be brought forward by my Department will ultimately achieve the goal the Deputy has intended without the potential negative consequences I have outlined. Therefore, while the general intention behind the Bill is acknowledged, the Government proposes to defer the reading of this Bill for 12 months. This will facilitate the finalisation of relevant measures that will be brought forward under the forthcoming housing for all strategy and directly related legislative proposals.

It will also allow for consideration of the final report of the Law Reform Commission on the reform and consolidation of compulsory purchase order laws, which is expected before the end of 2021.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: The Labour Party is very disappointed that the Government has sought to defer the Second Reading of the Bill for 12 months. We are disappointed because for thousands of people throughout the State the acquisition of a home is urgent in the here and now. Dressing up the deferment of this legislation, which arises from a report issued 48 years ago, and calling it premature because it is at variance with the Law Reform Commission's con-

sideration of the Acquisition of Development Land (Assessment of Compensation) Bill is not an honest argument to make as a rebuttal. It does not speak for the people who anxiously want to own a home, live in a home or have fixity of tenure at least or for those who wish to be able to rent a home. It speaks volumes about the fact that, from an ideological point of view, this Government and its component parts still believe that the market alone will deliver housing.

In this country, we have always had an approach whereby the State could provide. The implementation of the Kenny report is one mechanism for doing so. The promulgation of this legislation, which many people accept as being the outworking of the Kenny report and its recommendations, could not be deemed or adjudicated to be premature when it is self-evident, with many thousands of people waiting to get a house, that this issue is urgent and needs to be dealt with now.

There is no reason the Government could not support this legislation now, allow it to pass Second Stage and then deal with all the issues that the Minister of State raised in his contribution. The views of the Law Reform Commission on the consolidation of compulsory purchase order laws could be dealt with easily through the prism of this legislation. It could be done now rather than waiting for 12 months. It could be dealt with coterminous with the Government's housing for all strategy. We ask the Government to reconsider its position in respect of our humble legislation, which is the culmination of a wait of 48 years. We have been trying for some time to promulgate this legislation. If the Minister of State says that he is in principle in agreement with it, I do not see why it could not pass Second Stage at this point. All the issues he highlighted as reasons it cannot proceed could be debated on Committee Stage. There will be ample time in the coming 12 months, as opposed to going beyond 12 months, to deal with the issues the Minister of State has outlined.

The bottom line is that we, as public representatives, are dealing with thousands of people, young and old, who cannot get access to housing. They cannot build houses or purchase houses in their localities. There is no sense of a timescale for when they will see houses on the horizon.

The national planning framework is having the effect of dezoning land. Local authorities, like my local authority in Cork, are now taking zoned land out of the equation. In addition, Irish Water and other infrastructural deficits are not being addressed quickly in order that planning permissions can be secured and we can house the people we represent.

There is an opportunity in the here and now to address the issue of housing. It is the issue of our time and of our generation of politicians. I am disappointed that the Minister of State has come to us with this response.

Deputy Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: I, too, am disappointed with the response of the Minister of State. Ireland has had a dysfunctional relationship with property and housing for many years and it is making a great many people utterly miserable. Highly disproportionate amounts of people's incomes are shovelled into mortgage repayments and rents every month. That money could be spent on their families, on life and on connectivity with other human beings. Instead, we have all been sucked into the race to believe we have to chain ourselves to a mortgage for 30 or 40 years and spend a vast and disproportionate percentage of our income on servicing that mortgage. We are led to believe we have to spend vast amounts on rent to survive.

For years, we have handed the entire housing game to the private sector. This leads to people trying to make a quick buck. That leads, in turn, to issues like those we have seen this

week in Donegal, Mayo and throughout the country, as well as issues in my constituency of cowboy developers building apartment blocks that are not fit for purpose. Ten, 15 or 20 years later these issues then come to the fore.

We have people who are utterly miserable. The belief system is that this is the way it must be. People take the view that they must get on the ladder. This is a legacy issue. It is part of our cultural mentality that this is the way it should be. We convince people that they need to build their castle. Once a person builds the castle and is spending all that money on it and investing blood, sweat and tears in a mortgage, he or she will defend that castle. This leads to a lack of social cohesion. What happens is that people, in what is in many circumstances an understandable attempt to defend their castle, cannot look beyond it. Thus, the social cohesion needed within the wider community is lost. There will be objections to HSE facilities, social housing in the community, halting sites and other local developments because we have convinced everyone that they need to get a castle and plough money into it. Even though this is making people miserable, they believe they must defend it.

We cannot change the Irish psyche overnight. We understand the need for security and to have a home and live and raise a family in it. However, there has to come a point when we realise that we are in a cycle of misery.

We come back again and again to the issue of housing. It has collapsed Governments and almost collapsed our country ten years ago. It has brought the political system into disrepute. There have been tribunals. Why? They came about because of bribes. Why? They arose from housing, developers, dirty politics and brown envelopes. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael were up to their necks in it. There comes a point where we have to stop, change and believe we can do better. We have to understand that there is potential for a better way which the entire country can buy in to so that we do not have to be forever on the misery wheel. We may think it is making us happy but it is actually making us desperately unhappy. Think of all the money we could be spending on our children and families and on our lives.

The Kenny report spelled it out in 1974, which was before I was born. The suggestion was made that the Bill is pre-empting policy or is somehow previous. To be honest, we cannot take that comment seriously. Then it was suggested that we should delay Second Stage for 12 months. As my colleague, Deputy Sean Sherlock, said, that shows the Government does not understand the seriousness of the situation. If we are serious about housing, if we realise how immense this issue is for young people who are locked out of the housing market, for the generations of people who are living in the same home, for people spending money on rent which they cannot afford and for the country being done in by dodgy developers, then this is the type of Bill that the Government should definitely support, and support today and not in 12 months time.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Mattie McGrath): Glaoim ar an Teachta Ó Broin. Tá ocht nóiméad aige.

Deputy Eoin Ó Broin: I thank the Acting Chairman. Sinn Féin is proud to support fully this legislation to give effect to the 1973 Report of the Committee on the Price of Building Land, the Kenny report. The leader of the Labour Party, Deputy Kelly, rightly reminded us that on three occasions his party has introduced similar legislation. What he forgot to say, of course, is that during that same period of time his party has participated in six separate Governments since the Kenny report was published in 1973. While I am very grateful to him to give us this

opportunity to support this legislation today, many of us can agree that it would have been better if the Labour Party had sought to introduce this legislation when in government rather than just from the Opposition benches.

The Labour Party spokespeople are completely right that at the core of our housing crisis over the last 30 years has been a refusal of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael to accept that when the private sector is left to its own devices not only can it not solve our social and affordable housing crisis but, as we have seen in recent years, it will make it worse. Again, it has to be emphasised that on many occasions the Labour Party, as a junior partner in coalition, has facilitated those bad policies, notwithstanding its opposition to those policies from the previous Opposition budgets.

If one looks at the last time the Labour Party was in government, it is a testament to that failure. When last in government from 2011, the Labour Party contributed to the cutting of social housing budgets, resulting in social housing output crashing to its lowest level in decades in 2014. In that same year the Labour Party Minister of State with responsibility for housing, former Deputy Jan O'Sullivan, steered the housing assistance payment legislation through the Oireachtas which was a particularly retrograde change and not a short-term support for people while they were rightly waiting for social housing. This was a long-term social housing support which has resulted in very many families waiting even longer for their forever home.

The author of this Bill, Deputy Kelly, was the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government and his Social Housing Strategy 2020 is very difficult to distinguish from its successor: Rebuilding Ireland, with a low level of investment in the direct delivery of social housing and a dramatic over-reliance on the private sector and, in particular, on the private rental sector, to meet social housing need. This was a promise of cost rental that was never fulfilled during, in fairness to him, the then Minister's short term in office. The introduction of long-term leasing and other current expenditure delivery mechanisms which we have seen in more recent years have proved to be very costly to the taxpayer.

In fact I remember a very high profile spat between the then Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Deputy Kelly, and veteran homeless campaigner, Peter McVerry, who described the then Labour Party Minister's housing policies as *Alice in Wonderland* stuff.

Unfortunately, and it gives me no pleasure to say this, what happened in the years after those policies were introduced made the housing crisis worse. Not all of that was the fault of Deputy Kelly. He argued strongly for an increase in rent supplement but unfortunately his party colleague, the then Minister for Social Protection, former Deputy Joan Burton, blocked that. He also argued strongly for rent certainty by linking rents to the consumer price index, which was something that Sinn Féin also supported then. Former Fine Gael Deputy Michael Noonan actively blocked that. As a consequence rents spiralled out of control from 2014 to 2015 onwards which directly led to the accelerated homeless crisis since then. Fine Gael must bear the full and primary responsibility for that crisis, but it would be disingenuous for anybody in the Labour Party to say that their failure to convince their coalition partners to do the right thing absolves them of responsibility for the spiralling cost of rents and the homeless crisis that followed.

Having said all of that, I will work with anybody from any party who wants to do the right thing on housing and that is why Sinn Féin is more than happy to support this Bill. Land val-

ues, especially in our city centre, are now spiralling out of control. In some developments the unit price of land can be as much as €100,000, adding 25% to the cost of purchasing or indeed renting that home. This has been driven up by sweetheart tax deals for institutional investors. There is no tax on the rent roll or on capital gains and there are huge volumes of cheap money flooding into our housing system and pricing out working families, whether young or those who have left their homes due to mortgage repossessions or relationship break-downs and are looking to rent or buy at a later stage in life.

The consequence of all of that is that the only thing that is being built in Dublin city at the moment is high-end, expensive, build-to-rent. That is not conducive to the kind of sustainable urban development policies that the Government is meant to be espousing and that the Green Party argued so eloquently for during the election campaign. As a further consequence of that Sinn Féin and anybody with a wit of sense in how to deal with this housing crisis will support any measure that would dampen land prices.

I would go further in saying that this good piece of legislation needs to be supplemented by other measures. We desperately need a reform of the vacant site levy. It was too low initially and local authorities do not have the ability or the resources to collect it adequately. There is a strong argument not only for it to be increased but for it to be transferred to Revenue on a self-declaration basis to ensure that tax does what it is intended to do.

We also urgently need to introduce use-it-or-lose-it zonings in planning permissions. Having been given the uplift in the value of the land by a zoning or a grant of permission, a land-owner developer should not be allowed to sit on that property indefinitely and not develop it out. Unfortunately, not only is the Government not considering that but it is bringing forward legislation to the Seanad this week to extend planning permissions even further when there is no argument from a particular developer that necessitates such an extension.

At the core of any radical change in housing policy has to be a dramatic increase in direct State investment in the delivery of social, affordable rental and affordable purchase homes. The Economic and Social Research Institute, ESRI, has confirmed what Sinn Féin has been saying for many years which is to double that investment to at least €2.8 billion annually, if not more, to deliver those 20,000 public homes in social, affordable-cost-rental and affordable-purchase that are required.

I fully agree with Deputies Sherlock and Ó Ríordáin in respect of the Minister of State's remarks. It is telling that not a single member of Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael, as far as I can see, is in the Chamber. They are leaving it to the mudguard in coalition, the Green Party, to defend the completely indefensible. The idea, for example, that a Law Reform Commission report is a reason to delay is laughable given how often Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael-led Governments ignore those reports and leave them sitting on the shelf. The fact that the Government has other, similar proposals, somehow means that another good proposal cannot be progressed is, again, disingenuous. To hear the Green Party trot out the lines of former Deputy Eoghan Murphy and Deputy Coveney about unintended consequences on the private development sector that is not doing its job is completely laughable.

Crucially the Minister of State's remarks show that he does not understand the purpose of this Bill or the intention of those who have introduced it. It is to increase the supply of land to our public authorities to deliver public housing to meet social and affordable housing need and to dampen house prices and because this Bill does that Sinn Féin enthusiastically supports it and

urges all others to do likewise.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: Gabhaim buíochas leis an gCathaoirleach Gníomhach. As my colleague, an Teachta Ó Broin has outlined, we will be supporting this Bill. I was talking to my dad last night who is a very long-time housing activist and campaigner. I nearly used the word “veteran” but I would be afraid that he might be listening to this and I would be in trouble for that. He laughed when I told him that the proposal that was coming before us was from the Labour Party and he said that it was easy to know that the party was in opposition, as that party is always very enthusiastic for measures like the Kenny report when in that position. He asked me to ask if I got the chance why it is never that much of a priority when the Labour Party is in government. Deputy Howlin has outlined the attempts that were made by previous Labour Party people to bring this in but it was always done in opposition and never done when in government. That demands the question, notwithstanding that an Teachta Ó Broin has outlined that we will support this Bill, that some might ask whether it is very cynical on the part of the Labour Party to try to claim some kind of ownership now of any housing activism.

Notwithstanding that, if it is having a Damascene conversion, that is welcome. As an Teachta Ó Broin outlined, we will work with anyone and everyone who has a progressive policy on housing in order to address the crisis.

I wish to refer briefly to the remarks made by the Government representative here today to the effect that this move is premature. I will give my age now: I am the same age as the Kenny report. I was born in 1973. I am not premature, I am very much mature. We have a housing crisis. This report has been around for decades. I have heard my father and others who were activists with him in the Dublin Housing Action Committee talk at length about the Kenny report, how important it is, how we need to appreciate what is in it and implement it. It is not premature, in fact if anything it is bloody decades overdue. If the Government cannot see that, I genuinely fear for the people who are depending on it to do the right thing.

When I was almost 25 years old, I was able to buy a house with my husband. We both had normal jobs, I worked in administration and he had a job in the area of technology. We had very normal, ordinary incomes. We were the first of our friendship group to be able to do it but we were by no means outliers. It was a reasonable aspiration at the age of 24 or 25 if you had decent, secure employment that you would be able to buy a house, which in this country is the only way you can have the type of security you want if you have a young family, as we did at the time. That is no longer the case for people. The Minister of State would do well to reflect on the lived reality of his policies and those he supports.

I want to quote Mark O'Halloran, a very well-known actor and screenwriter. He wrote:

My career might be judged a success - but when it comes to the property market, I'm a complete failure ... Our political class have forgotten that housing is a right and not simply an opportunity to redistribute money upwards to the wealthy.

He also stated:

I'm one of those people doomed to live amongst other people's furniture. The type of guy who has to ask, at the age of 51, for permission to own a cat. It's sort of funny really. Except it's not, 'cause now I'm afraid for the future. And with good cause.

There are real people depending on us to do the right thing.

Deputy Pa Daly: This Bill is welcome for a number of reasons. I commend Labour on introducing it. The need for a more equitable and rounded view of land, the purchase of land and policy relating to land has been urgent for decades. I noticed it in particular last night when canvassing on behalf of Senator Lynn Boylan around the Irishtown and Ringsend area, where, time after time, it came up on the doorsteps that people cannot afford the €500,000 needed to purchase houses for themselves or their families to keep them close to their loved ones in the area. There is no social or affordable housing being built in the area to any significant extent. It is not only in Irishtown and Ringsend, it is the whole country. In Tralee, after the economic crash and particularly under the Government that came to power in 2011, the waiting time relating to the town council's housing list increased from approximately seven years initially to 14 years in 2020. That was as a direct result of Government policy which led to the building of affordable and social housing being halted. The list expanded unbelievably. There were plenty of schemes, such as the housing assistance payment, HAP, leasing, the rental accommodation scheme, RAS, etc. The abolition of the town council in Tralee by the Labour-Fine Gael Government also made things more difficult. Community cohesion was affected because houses that had been constructed during the boom became investment properties and were rented out. The good council policy of integrating estates was thrown to one side when investors threw Tom, Dick and Harry into the houses without any vetting, something that led to disputes and difficulties with unsuitable tenants.

We continue to suffer the consequences of housing policy over decades but, particularly, that adopted over the past ten years. Housing policy has resulted in rising house prices, no social and affordable housing and vulture funds running amok.

Another reason Sinn Féin supports the Bill is that it is a response to ever-increasing constitutional rigidity within Government policy. Previous speakers referred to matters being unconstitutional. Now, the Government has given the excuse that we must wait for the Law Reform Commission's reports. That is ridiculous. The constitutional provisions relating to property are also causing problems. This rigidity is, of course, performative and insincere in many instances, but is particularly marked by Fine Gael Ministers professing all too often that their hands are tied legally. The courts understand that the Legislature has the right to legislate for the benefit of the common good. Housing is one of the most important services we, as a society, provide. The response "We would need a referendum for that" is not good enough. Of course, that prompts the question of how the Government's case and record would stand up in the face of such a referendum.

Another reason the Bill is welcome is the failure of successive Governments' policies on housing, particularly as the fundamentals of land and land pricing have never been addressed. The serviced sites fund is one example in this regard. That fund is supposed to support local authorities in the provision of key enabling infrastructure on their land and to prepare sites for the delivery of affordable housing. In the estates of Cahermoneen, Westcourt, Ard na Lí - all good estates close to the centre of my town - local people were allowed to buy sites that were serviced. This kept the community together and, importantly, provided assistance to small and medium builders and tradespeople to stay working and boosted the local economy. Despite being open for four years, the serviced sites fund has delivered zero homes in Kerry and has not delivered homes that are affordable in other parts of the State either. Serviced sites works so well but the fund is practically dormant. It could be used to unlock solutions and possibilities in towns and villages throughout the county.

Deputy Johnny Mythen: I commend the Labour Party on bringing forward this Bill. It

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does not offer the full solution to our country's diabolical housing crisis but it does provide a significant valuable tool to local authorities to combat land hoarding and landbanking. Herein lies the inevitable challenge. There are existing unregulated land banks where developers distort the market by limiting supply. Owners of large sites have held onto underdeveloped land rather than build new homes because it will depress prices and affect future returns. Over-reliance on market forces will never solve the housing crisis. I formally request that the Minister do something that has never been done here, namely, get his Department to carry out a thorough empirical analysis of landbanking. Let us face facts: the market disregards social justice and certainly does not take into account the common good.

This Bill is based on the principle of social justice and the right of the Government to exercise its constitutional power through Article 44 to delimit, by law, private property rights for the purpose of the common good. In a sovereign republic, the delimiting of private property rights must be subservient to social justice and the well-being of all citizens.

I was contacted by a young working couple from County Wexford. They managed to save a deposit despite paying substantial rent of €920 per month. The house they wanted to buy was valued at €275,000. The agent, advised by the bank, gazumped the price by €30,000 within a week of their bid, putting their hopes and dreams of owning a home of their own out of sight. This is not a one-off; we have seen it happen again and again across the country. It is an indictment of successive Governments that, in 2021, almost 48 years after its publication, we are still trying to introduce the Kenny report, which proposes that land being purchased under compulsory purchase order by a local authority be capped at its existing value, plus a reasonable addition. I again call on the Minister to commission a thorough analysis of landbanking and land hoarding through the Department as it is one of, if not the biggest, obstacle to affordable homes for middle and low-income families. I ask all Deputies to support the Bill.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: The Social Democrats strongly welcome and support this Bill. In life and in politics, we must look at what people do rather than what they say. That is true in respect of housing policy, in particular. It is not just the veteran trade unionist and housing activist, Mick O'Reilly, who has noticed that the Labour Party has consistently raised the implementation of the Kenny report while in opposition, and consistently forgotten about it while in government. Everybody who has taken an interest in the Kenny report has noticed that.

It is 48 years since the Kenny report was introduced. For 21 of those years, the Labour Party was in government, over six Governments, from 1973 to 1977, 1981 to 1982, 1982 to 1987, 1992 to 1994, 1994 to 1997 and 2011 to 2016. During most of the times the Labour Party was in government, the Ministers with responsibility for the environment and housing were Labour Party Ministers. It rings hollow to hear the Labour Party talk about the implementation of the Kenny report when it has had so many opportunities to implement it.

I agree strongly with Deputy Kelly's statement that if the Kenny report had been implemented back in 1973, we would not be in the position we are now. That is correct. It is also the case, unfortunately, that when Deputy Kelly was the Minister with responsibility for housing, the number of social homes built was the lowest in decades. Rents started spiralling out of control when he was Minister. No rent certainty or regulation was introduced. It was left to a Fine Gael Minister to bring in the rent pressure zones, ineffective as they are. The numbers of homeless people, particularly families and children, started to go through the roof when Deputy Kelly was Minister. While the Bill is welcome, when parties get into government they must

show as much commitment to these measures as they voice in opposition.

David McWilliams stated:

Ireland is the least populated country in western Europe, yet we have among the highest land prices. It's a stitch-up. It is really that simple.

He is entirely correct about that. It is a stitch-up. It is the result of failed policies on housing and land, where the policies benefit the few at a huge cost to everyone else. The uplift in land values from public investment in infrastructure and rezoning, which is done through a public process, is captured privately. That is why the implementation of the Kenny report is so important.

Deputy Howlin spoke eloquently about land speculation and windfall profits from it. He was dead right about that. People who speculate on land do not do anything productive to reap those profits. They just happen to have the money to be able to buy up a load of land, sit on it, wait - or indeed lobby - for it to be rezoned and accrue massive profits from it. What Deputy Howlin seems to forget is that when he was the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and introduced a budget in the Dáil with the then Minister for Finance, former Deputy Michael Noonan, he abolished the 80% windfall tax that was in place against profits on rezoned land. It was probably the measure that came closest to some sort of implementation of the Kenny report in the 48 years since the report was introduced. This measure was abolished when Deputy Howlin had responsibility for it. He now talks about windfall profits and speculation, correctly so, and how they should be tackled but seems to have no memory as to what he did when he was the Minister with responsibility for this area.

Eloquence is great, as are the points that have been made. However, what we really need is for those who articulate those points and those who are in government to fight to implement them every step of the way, not to shrug their shoulders and then suddenly remember them when they are back in opposition. That is no use to anyone. It is no use to the thousands of people who have become homeless, especially in the years since the Labour Party was last in government, during which time rents have spiralled.

Public land is the key to providing the number of social, affordable and cost-rental homes that we need. We need to provide social homes at affordable purchase prices or costs to the State that represent good value. The key to that is ensuring enough public land is available. It is simply no good if parties continue to vote to sell public land to private developers at knock-down rates so they can build homes on the land, the majority of which are sold at full market prices. That is what is happening. It is what Labour Party councillors recently voted for, alongside Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Green Party councillors. We can make all the eloquent speeches we want, but if we keep selling public land at knock-down prices to private developers, including one of the largest developers in the country with one of the largest land banks that is producing homes at a very slow rate in order to maintain market prices at the level at which it wants to deliver them, we will not get any closer to solving this problem. Keeping land in public ownership is key.

The other key part of the equation is following the advice of the ESRI to avail of historically low interest rates in order to finance the construction of public and social homes, cost rental and affordable purchase. At the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage, in a discussion on the Land Development Agency, I raised the point that we should no

longer follow the fiscal rules, which are an orthodoxy that no one else is following. The Minister legitimately responded that he does not have a crystal ball and cannot see into the future. I am not asking the Government to get a crystal ball and see into the future. I am asking it to see what is happening now in terms of 120,000 households that are on housing waiting lists or in insecure HAP tenancies and need their housing needs met. I am asking it to see what is happening in terms of over 8,000 people living in emergency accommodation. I am asking it to see, as the ESRI has pointed out, that growth is outpacing interest rates. Even in the most fiscally conservative analysis that the ESRI has produced, it still makes sense to at least double investment in the construction of homes. That is a conservative fiscal analysis. In fact, the ESRI has stated that it would be irresponsible not to do that. What the Government is doing now is irresponsible. It is irresponsible not to avail of current interest rates.

The Social Democrats very much welcome and support the Bill. However, I hope those proposing such legislation will actually seek to deliver on it when they are in government, and not just when they are in opposition.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: People Before Profit will support the Labour Party Bill. We welcome it. Indeed, it has some similarities to the Thirty-ninth Amendment of the Constitution (Right to Housing) Bill 2020 that People Before Profit recently introduced in the House and which, fortunately, passed to Second Stage, in that it seeks to delimit the rights of private property relative to the social and common good of ensuring that people have a right to secure and affordable housing.

Insofar as the Bill seeks to empower local authorities to compulsorily purchase land suitable for housing and ensure that landowners and property developers hoarding land do not benefit as they have done, obscenely, from the ownership of land that is rezoned or serviced, then it is a good measure. It will help control land prices which have contributed significantly to the current housing crisis, particularly the extraordinary unaffordability of the housing that has been built, and curtail the shocking and obscene profits made by land hoarders and speculators.

The Bill will also deal with one of the key issues that contributed to corruption in this country around the rezoning process. For all those reasons, People Before Profit will support the Bill. The Government's deferral of this Bill is a disgrace and its justifications threadbare, but as usual it is dancing to the tune of the private market, developers, investment funds and speculators.

For that reason, the Labour Party's criticisms today of successive Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Governments, members of which did not want to implement the Kenny report and have danced to the tune of the developers and speculators who caused this housing crisis, is absolutely just and valid. As others have said, however, Labour Party members need to stick up their hands and acknowledge that when they were in office they did not bring forward this Bill and, indeed, moved in exactly the opposite direction. Empowering local authorities by giving them the right to compulsorily purchase land being hoarded for housing and creating the legal framework for it is absolutely useless if, when the Labour Party was in government, land in public hands was simultaneously unloaded, on a scale unprecedented in the history of the State, into the hands of the very investment funds and speculators who created the crisis. Of course, that is what happened during the 2011 to 2016 Fine Gael-Labour Party Government, which included housing Ministers, largely, from the Labour Party and a Labour Party Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. I vividly remember appealing, as other Deputies did in the House, to the Labour Party about the folly of unloading what turned out to be €40 billion worth of land assets that

were finally in the State's hands back into the hands of the vulture funds, speculators and property developers who had wrecked the economy.

We need to think about this because it speaks to other matters that need to be addressed in the Bill. I am not just saying that to score points. That land and property is now probably worth double what it was. We know vast profits have been made from it and that half of these strategic housing developments, SHDs, are probably on land unloaded by the National Asset Management Agency, NAMA, under a Fine Gael-Labour Party Government into the hands of these people, who are sitting on it. This Bill will not even deal with that planning permission issue. The value of that €40 billion worth of land that was in public hands was given to these people. They then received planning permission under the SHDs that doubled its value and they are now sitting on the land. This Bill will not even deal with that, much as we support it. We need to unravel the damage done in that period. We need mechanisms to take that land and property back from those people. We need to explore every avenue to get at the windfall profits they made because they were not taxed properly in order to recover the damage that was done and led to the current housing and homelessness crisis.

We absolutely support this Bill but we have to acknowledge the damage done because we must undo it. We have to call out NAMA part 2, in the form of the Land Development Agency, LDA, which, after NAMA, will turn out to be the next biggest heist of public land that could be used for public and affordable housing to address the housing crisis. Instead, just like the NAMA disaster, some of the public land bank will be unloaded into the hands of private financiers and investment funds, leading inexorably to the same disastrous consequences we had in the past.

I have to use this opportunity to give an example of how much further we have to go to undo this damage. I have repeatedly raised the case of the St. Helen's Court development in my area. Of course, no Minister is even here. I apologise, a Minister of State is in the Chamber. There are many aspects to the St. Helen's Court development, an apartment complex in which working people have lived, in many cases for 20, 15 or five years, which is owned by vulture funds. These funds are sitting on this development, have managed to drive out about three quarters of the tenants, people who have done nothing wrong, and are trying to evict the rest of them. As part of the plan to drive up the value of that property, ten of those apartments have been sitting empty for two and a half years. These are perfectly good refurbished apartments, which the funds are just sitting on. That is just one case but it is happening all over the city. What will we do about it? What is in this Bill, as good as it is, does not undo that damage.

We need a proactive policy so that any developer, investment fund or landlord sitting on empty property in order to drive up its value and evict its tenants has to be stopped and the property taken from them. They should not gain a red cent. They should not get 125% on it; in fact, it should not even be 100%. The maximum they should get is the cost at which the property was acquired, nothing more. There should be no allowance for them to make profit out of planning permission, sitting on land or property or speculating. Indeed, they should not be allowed to evict people who have done absolutely nothing wrong, as they are trying to do in St. Helen's Court and in many other places. The figures that came out this week on the number of evictions taking place show that huge numbers of tenants who have done absolutely nothing wrong will be made homeless because these people are allowed get away with it.

We support the Bill and absolutely condemn the Government's decision to defer it. However, we have to go much further to undo the disastrous damage done as a result of NAMA,

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which the Government wants to repeat with the LDA by privatising land that was, or is, in public ownership.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Mattie McGrath): The Regional Group is next. Deputy Seán Canney is sharing time with Deputy Verona Murphy.

Deputy Seán Canney: Deputy Murphy may not arrive in time as she is running late. If she does not arrive, I will take the remainder of the time.

Housing is probably one of the biggest topics to have come back on the agenda since the advent of Covid in March of last year. I welcome the Labour Party's introduction of this Bill. It is very appropriate we enact policies we believe will make housing more affordable to more people.

I know from my experiences over the past ten years that people who have money have been buying land and property and sitting on it. In the trade, it is called hoarding and flipping at the appropriate time to make a killing without actually doing anything with the land or site. The practice is prevalent throughout the country. People who are cash-rich, such as companies and investors, can do this at will. They can sit on land and wait to see how the market goes. They are speculators. We need to remove that from the whole industry of construction and housing.

It is very clear that, right now, the housing market is dysfunctional. There is no one silver bullet that will solve it. Many things will have to be done. We are getting to a stage where throwing money at the problem will not solve it. We need to have the fundamentals right, which may not get houses built today but will ensure that, in future, houses will be built at an affordable price.

I will raise the issue of our county development plans. When I was a councillor, one practice I never really agreed with was the zoning of only a certain percentage of lands in an area on the basis of projected growth. That has created a scarce commodity, zoned residential land, only a certain amount of which is available in every town and city. We have an issue, therefore, when somebody who owns this land can sit on it and command a higher price. We should be zoning more lands in our towns and villages. We have an opportunity to do that now in our county development plans, which are being reviewed. We need to do that to ensure more land is available for development at an affordable price to allow people build their homes.

Yesterday's protests about the mica disaster have highlighted how important our homes are to us, as families, in Ireland. Everybody has the right to live in a home and to be able to live life to the full without being a slave to a huge mortgage. We need to ensure that people are allowed to live in their own homes in an affordable way.

An issue that has arisen recently relates to construction costs. The cost of building houses or any form of construction is rising. Part of the reason for the increase is that the standards in construction have been upped to such an extent that between 15% and 25% additional cost is being added to the cost of building a house. This is moving the cost of building and the cost of sale very much out of the reach of many people. If additional regulations are being implemented, we need to be able to give supports to people who have the courage to get a mortgage to build their own homes, rather than relying on the State to do it. We have to give them more encouragement to do that in a way that will not inflate the entire market.

A bugbear that I have raised on numerous occasions in the House is that there is potential

to house people within a very short time through usage of existing housing stock that is vacant. There are numerous properties in every town and village in which people could be living over shops or developing units into modern living spaces. They are being hampered from doing so as they are caught up in issues relating to planning and protected structures. Assistance has to be provided in that regard. It may be necessary to exempt these buildings from planning in order that they can be developed and we can ensure there are living spaces in towns and villages.

As for the affordability of housing, I have raised many times the fact that Irish Water was set up to provide waste water and water services in order that we could develop housing and other residential communities in a strategic way. The problem with Irish Water - it is not the problem of the company but it is our problem - is that it has not been funded to the extent it needs. I have first-hand knowledge of that in my county of Galway. While I was a county councillor, we did feasibility studies on setting up municipal treatment plants in towns and villages in the county. A site was earmarked for a waste water treatment plant for the east of the county, to be located to the east of the city, to allow the city and county to develop. This was all being worked on by Galway County Council prior to the inception of Irish Water. When Irish Water was formed and put in place, all of those projects dropped off the agenda for the simple reason that Irish Water does not have the funding to put waste water treatment plants into towns such as Craughwell, Abbeyknockmoy, Mountbellew or Corrofin in my constituency, which are growth centres that can feed the city and larger towns. The reason it cannot develop is because it cannot get planning permission from Galway County Council. It has been refused permission by An Bord Pleanála. Effectively, planning in these areas has been frozen out. The contradiction is that many Members are frowning at the idea that people can live in a rural area in the county and every obstacle is being put in their way, be it by Transport Infrastructure Ireland or from a housing need perspective. In some cases, family members are not even allowed to build on family farm land. This cannot continue. We need to address this issue in a wholesome manner.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Mattie McGrath): Anois, we move to the Rural Independent Group.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I thank the Acting Chairman for giving me his speaking time on this issue. I very much appreciate the opportunity. At a time when the Government and the Department are trying to envisage every way they can stop people from living in the countryside, it is more important than ever that local authorities be given the wherewithal to purchase land at affordable rates and do what they used always do and what they were good at, that is, buying a piece of ground and getting a local building contractor to build local authority houses that local people would be allowed to live in and eventually purchase. That is what we want. Obviously, there is room for and a need for developers as well. Anybody who thinks that business will not, cannot or should not continue is wrong. What we do not want is for that to happen at the expense of local authorities because, for instance, in the county I represent, whether in Tralee, Listowel, Killarney, Killorglin or the other towns and smaller villages, there is a massive housing need. While it is acceptable for a person to be on a housing list for a certain length of time, what I have seen through the years, first as a member of the local authority and subsequently as an Oireachtas Member, is that the time people remain on the list has increased. No notice is now taken of a person who says he or she has been on the list for eight, nine or ten years. In our case, that is not the fault of Kerry County Council. Rather, it is due to local authorities not being given the wherewithal by the Department, under not just this Government, but successive Governments, to address this issue. Of course, I am totally against the idea of people hoarding land. Doing so is wrong. I want to see local authorities being allowed to and

given the money to purchase land on which to build local authority houses.

Deputy Michael Collins: As all Deputies know, the housing crisis is out of control. Far too many people are being refused the basic human need of shelter. Their need is not being met through absolutely no fault of their own. Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil have failed repeatedly to build the housing our citizens need in the right place, at the right price and in the right quantity. The crisis is touching every demographic. It can be felt across the country and has victims numbering in the hundreds of thousands. Housing has become too costly and too scarce and the ability to buy a home has become the reserve of the privileged few. The time has come for radical action. In the absence of action being taken by the Government, it is up to others to step in.

In spite of the boom, bust and boom again in the housing market, the housing needs of an ever-growing number of people are not being met. The housing system is one of winners and losers. The winners are landlords, investment funds, property speculators and developers, while the losers include the homeless, those on low incomes, first-time buyers, tenants and those with special needs. In my constituency of Cork South-West it is becoming an impossible situation. The Government will have to step up because it has put so many restrictions on young people trying to get planning. These people are not looking to get a house through the social housing system at all. They are being refused planning day in, day out. I have been approached by numerous people who have been refused planning permission. These are young people trying to get off the ground. Some of them cannot get a mortgage even if they go through the system. The system is completely and utterly corrupt and wrong and against ordinary young families trying to start off, get a little bit of ground from their father and mother and apply for planning permission. It is outrageous how the Government has stood idly by.

Deputy Canney is quite right regarding waste water and Irish Water not being properly funded. I refer to towns such as Castletownshend and Goleen and the extension to the sewer system in Ballinspittle. All these towns are stagnant. Nothing is happening because of the inaction of the Government.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I thank the Labour Party for opening up the debate but I do not agree with the proposal that seeks to give local authorities authority to issue compulsory purchase orders, CPOs, for land in order to build houses. That is wrong. The Planning Regulator is dezoning land. I believe we should zone more land around towns and villages or, otherwise, not zone any land but let every planning application go through on its merits, whether that is through the local authority or An Bord Pleanála. Dezoning land is giving a monopoly to the developer. When the developer has that, the price will be more expensive for the couple trying to buy a house. I am not in favour of CPOs.

Kerry County Council has not been able to buy land for over 20 years and all its plots of land are gone or built on. Instead, it is getting money from the Department to buy built houses and that is actually competing with young couples who are trying to buy houses. The local authority has 165 voids and it does not have enough money to bring them back to the standard which is being demanded. As to the cost of materials, we know what is happening with timber as we cannot cut a stick. Small builders have to carry the full cost of building houses because there are no stage payments. Between them, levies and regulations are detrimental to progression.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Mattie McGrath): The time is up. I call Deputy Richard O'Donoghue.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: It is more than a year since I was elected before which I was on the county council for six years. This was brought to the House today by the Labour Party. While Deputy Kelly was in government and was the Minister with responsibility for housing, he had a track record like the LDA - he did not build a bloody house. This is what we are coming down to. The records are there to show Labour's double standards. Here today, its Members are saying, "Let us look at this", but while they were in government, they did nothing about it.

Limerick needs 1,000 houses built per year, as announced by the Limerick chamber of commerce, and we set up Limerick 2030 to help us build these houses. What has Limerick 2030 got that the LDA does not have? The LDA has a national problem but we need these houses implemented locally. On Limerick 2030, we have council representatives and local authority representatives whose job is to produce houses for the city and county, which they are doing, and there are 250 planning permissions in at present to build houses at Mungret. It is also investing in towns and villages in our county. However, this Government and successive Governments have never invested one penny in infrastructure so that a house can be built in the towns and villages of the county. That is a failure of the Labour Party, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and now the Green Party, which are making it impossible for people who want to build houses to get planning permission to build houses, and build them without putting any pressure on the local authorities.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Mattie McGrath): The time is up.

Deputy Richard O'Donoghue: This is what we have to look at today. The record shows it and history shows it. If the media can do anything, they should go back on the history of all of these parties and show their double standards.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: I am glad to have the opportunity to speak in this debate. I want to support this important Bill. There is no doubt it is needed and that the ongoing speculation and profiteering on land values is disgusting and should be addressed. The political system has always made it so and that is why this Bill should be supported in order to try to curtail the political system making speculation profitable. The political system has always hidden behind the single judgment of the Supreme Court and never challenged it in order to provide cover for itself, and to ensure that a policy that would benefit all our citizens, rather than the chosen few who own land, would never be developed.

It has generally done this to facilitate the owners and profiteers who have been supporters of the parties in control or in power. Since the publication of the Kenny report in 1973, that party in power has predominantly been Fianna Fáil. However, for a significant portion of that time, Fine Gael has been in power. What is interesting about Fine Gael in this context is that it could not have been in power without the Labour Party, which today is lamenting that the Kenny report has never been implemented. I read with interest the introduction to the Bill by Deputy Kelly, in which he outlines that this is the third occasion on which the Labour Party has introduced this Bill, having done so in 1990, 2003 and again today. The interesting thing about these dates is that they are when Labour was out of government. Maybe that is the time to do something like this. We have seen how principles and policies made in opposition are left outside the door when government beckons in supporting Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael.

I want to put the following dates on the record: 1973 to 1977; 1981 to early 1982; late 1982 to 1987; 1992 to 1994; 1994 to 1997; and 2011 to 2016. In 19 out of 48 years, the Labour Party

has been in government, and they are the years Labour has been in government since the Kenny report was published. Why, then, could Labour not have used one of those occasions to do the right thing? Sure, its Members will say they were only lowly Labour and could not implement the policies they wanted - but on six occasions? There is a saying about repeating the same thing and expecting a different outcome. Not to mention that it was a Labour Party Minister who introduced the housing assistance payment, HAP, that tied crazy rental prices to landlords with the result that €1.3 billion is to be paid to private landlords this year, or that it was the Labour Party which made the austerity of Fine Gael possible from 2011 to 2016 by keeping the unions quiet, not all of them but the majority of them, although, thankfully, there were some notable exceptions.

I hope there is a lesson here for other parties and individuals thinking about the possibility of government, namely, they should implement what they say and make that a central plank of their policies. That is what I will do. I will not be putting forward great policy ideas in opposition and then dropping them when the possibility of government is on the horizon, along with a comfy ministerial seat. It gives politics in Ireland a bad name when people see parties sitting in opposition, espousing great policies, and then, when they go into government and get the opportunity to do that, they do not actually do it. They change and everything is left outside. We have seen it with the Green Party in the last year, we saw it with the Labour Party before that and we saw it with the Green Party before that; we see it continuously and it keeps repeating itself. It is time to change that. Maybe the Labour Party can be part of that change, if it decides it is going to do it properly and not do it by selling out.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Peter Burke): I thank all the Deputies for their engagement. For my period in the Chamber, I have listened very carefully and with interest to many of the contributions made. It has been useful to have an opportunity to explain the Government position to the Members of the House and to hear their views on the long-standing question of how best we can ensure a share of increased land value arising from public policy decisions and investment, for the wider public benefit. This is a matter of significant concern not just to Members of this House but to the wider public and cuts deep into the heart of the challenges we face today regarding housing and related issues.

I hope the debate has clarified why the Government is seeking to defer the reading of this Bill for 12 months. I want to acknowledge that the points raised during the debate may be very well intentioned. However, I am still convinced that this Private Member's Bill will have many unintended consequences and will only serve to undermine what the Government is working to achieve. As explained by the Minister of State, Deputy Noonan, the Bill is premature when we take account of work currently under way, and the extra time will be well used to achieve a better outcome. While there is some common ground on the need to address these issues, this Bill would be premature to both the final report of the Law Reform Commission on the reform and consolidation of compulsory purchase order laws, which is expected before the end of 2021, and proposals on the issue of community gain currently being advanced by my Department, in line with the programme for Government. This will take the form of a key flagship measure arising from the forthcoming Housing for All strategy and directly-related legislative proposals being concurrently formulated as a general scheme for a new legislative proposal.

Like the Deputy, the Government is committed to dealing with this complex and thorny issue, underlined by the fact it has not been addressed to the extent now proposed since the Kenny report was published in 1973. It is to some extent a legacy issue but also remains relevant to the

challenges we face today. Therefore, how we address the matter needs to be comprehensive but it also needs to be fair, equitable and proportionate, in line with the principles of social justice, espoused in the Deputy's Bill. The key difference between the Deputy's Bill and the Government's position is the approach.

As previously referenced, the provisions of Deputy Kelly's Bill are based on the 1973 Kenny report, which proposed a land value capture mechanism, whereby designated development lands at the edge of built-up areas could be acquired by the State at existing use value generally envisaged as agricultural land at agricultural value plus 25%, to facilitate the development of housing. Although adopted by Government at the time, the provisions of the Kenny report were not implemented but have remained a point of reference. The issue of community gain and a more equitable distribution of increases in land value as a result of the planning decisions in respect of zoning and public investment in infrastructure must now be addressed. I know Deputies from all parties and none agree with that commitment.

The proposals in the Bill have been well aired at this stage. However, it is important to recap on the implications of the Bill, if enacted, and to reiterate the potential adverse consequences which are a key concern for the Government. In summary, if enacted, this Bill would be a disincentive to buy or sell development land and for the delivery of residential development that could impact housing supply in the short-medium term, create uncertainty in the development sector, be disproportionate and discriminate against new entrants to the market, not provide a mechanism for fair or equitable application and be impractical to apply. My colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Noonan, explained the finer detail of these points in his opening address if Deputies need to refer to it.

It is also worth noting that while the Kenny report has remained a reference point, it is vital we acknowledge the critical differences between now and when the Kenny report was completed. There are now 2 million more people living in Ireland, our cities and towns are much larger and society has change immeasurably. The Kenny report was of its time, a point of reference, but we need to treat it with caution given the changes in the intervening period, almost half a century later. The principles of land value capture as set out in the Kenny report and informing this Bill remain important considerations, but need to be applied in a manner that is appropriate to 21st century societal and environmental priorities.

The extra 12 months being sought by the Government will allow us to treat this matter with the utmost care and consideration. I think it is a reasonable request given all the complexities involved and outlined. It is really important we use the time to achieve the best possible outcome and to address this properly and in a manner that can withstand any future challenge rather than just get it done. This needs to be robust and enduring. I want that to be the legacy that we leave to future generations and I am confident that all Members are genuinely committed to that principle.

The emerging measures being developed by my Department, in the context of Housing for All, are intended to be more practical, equitable and proportionate proposals for community gain related to planning and public investment that seek to balance the need for land, infrastructure and affordable housing, while at the same time taking into account the rights of private landowners, having regard to the overall benefit to society.

The proposals that will be brought forward by my Department will ultimately achieve the goal the Deputy intended, without having the potential negative consequences. While I cannot

be definitive on the specifics at this stage, myself and my officials will be happy to engage with this House, or indeed the joint committee or other fora, once the proposals are approved by the Government and published. While the general intention behind the Bill is acknowledged, the Government proposes to defer the reading of the Bill, as outlined earlier, for 12 months.

I want to refer to one or two points made by various Deputies. One of those points relates to an area of my responsibility, namely, rural planning. I never hear it acknowledged in this House that rural planning has consistently represented 25% of housing output in recent years and it has remained at that level despite many of the charges we hear that it is impossible to get rural planning permission. I also point to the Office of the Planning Regulator, OPR, report, which gives a clear line and detail of planning in every county and the planning decisions that have been made. As referenced earlier, 87% of all one-off planning applications were granted in Limerick county during the past five years; 7% were refused and 6% were withdrawn. Members need to take a proportionate approach when making charges about rural planning in this House. We need to be consistent in what we say.

In terms of zoning, taking account of housing demands and needs into the future, ten local authorities in this State will have to increase their housing output by 250% over the next five years and more than ten will have to increase it by 100%. That gives us a clear line in terms of zoning. We hear people say that not enough land is zoned but there was a time when we had enough land zoned to accommodate 10 million people. At that time infrastructure was not aligned with the key potential for development. We did not have key wastewater and sewerage services and all the infrastructure needed to make communities more sustainable. When people are making these charges they need to make reference to those important facts and check the reports and decisions that have been made. Sometimes when one listens to people speak in this House one would think there was not one one-off housing application granted in this State when that could not be further from the truth. It represents by far the majority of applications. In some counties it represents well above 87%. While there are counties that are in difficulty in terms of environmental issues, such as Leitrim with which we are working, in the main the facts speak for themselves. As I have said previously, we are updating the rural planning guidelines in that regard. In terms of our rural debate, we need honesty and a bit of truth to reflect some of the facts that are spoken about.

I welcome this opportunity to respond to the Labour Party's Private Members' Bill. It is very well intentioned and I acknowledge we want to work with it to bring many of the points in the Bill to fruition.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Mattie McGrath): I call na Teachtaí Ged Nash agus Duncan Smith who will each have cúig nóiméad.

Deputy Ged Nash: I agree with the Minister of State that honesty and truth would be very welcome, and from the Opposition as well. Many of the lazy contributions we heard this morning remind me of the lads who have never kicked a ball in their lives who roar at the top of their voices at the telly telling the Irish intentional team how to play football. Most of them have never togged out. In fact, the idea they would ever tog out for Government would bring them out in a cold sweat. They should put on the boots, wear the jersey and come back to us.

I missed Deputy Ó Broin's contribution earlier but I am informed it was reliably and predictably enough a load of old guff. I will not take a history lesson from a party which would like us to air-brush its recent horrific past. Sinn Féin is completely untested in this jurisdiction

but where it is tested the youth homelessness statistics speak for themselves. Northern Ireland is no utopia when it comes to the housing issue. Sinn Féin cannot say one thing in Dundalk and do an entirely different thing in Derry. That is partitionism *par excellence*. The part-time progressives in Sinn Féin really ought to drop the partitionist act.

Why can we not get housing right in this country? It is because of the crushing financialisation of housing, the fetishisation of land ownership and the rewarding of speculation. I am a generation away from the corporation house. I can say the same for practically all of my Labour Party Oireachtas colleagues. My parents benefited from the great schemes of well-designed homes built in towns like Drogheda when the State was only 20 or 30 years in existence. When they married in the early 1970s, an unskilled factory worker and a confectioner, they could afford to buy a modest three-bedroom home for the family they planned to have, safe in the knowledge that come what may they would be able to pay the mortgage. In 2021, a hard-working couple of modest means does not stand a chance. The option of a decent home built by the local authority in my area is ten years away and a fortune in taxpayers' money wasted on the housing assistance payment, HAP, scheme.

Housing and speculation as a source of enrichment for a small few at the expense of the common good began under a business and political culture made by the previous generation in Fianna Fáil. The younger citizens of today's Ireland are the longest suffering victims of a financial crash that was the logical result of an economy based on the hope that people would endlessly keep selling homes to each other at ever inflating prices. This Ponzi scheme and the lax regulation and greed which let it happen wreaked havoc. From 2011 to 2015, there was little money to do anything apart from staying afloat. This point is deliberately ignored by some and conveniently so. When more resources became available, Fine Gael Ministers were ideologically incapable of seeing the scale of the problem and fixing it by finally tackling extortionate land costs, building more public and affordable homes and properly managing rents in a fair manner. Instead of moving heaven and earth to provide the homes we need, they spent almost 600% more on the housing assistance payment, HAP, in 2019 than in 2016. What a manifest waste of money.

Until now, Fianna Fáil's signature intervention was an enhanced help to buy scheme - same old Fianna Fáil, never learning - another waste of taxpayer's money with developers factoring the terms of the scheme into their price and prices are driven up with a policy which has been shown to benefit disproportionately those who already have the price of a deposit. This is economic illiteracy at its worst. The Labour Party's Bill, if the Government decides to accept it and which it is kicking to touch, would be a critical piece of the jigsaw in terms of housing supply.

By supporting this key legislation, the Government would be sending out a message that this Government has learned. It would signal it has finally learned the financialisation of the housing market must end and speculation must come a distant second place to the common good and the public interest. The calculation both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil have always made is that once house prices keep rising, the voters will be happy. However, the world has changed and Ireland is changing.

If the Minister of State does not want to listen to younger people and their families, he should listen to IBEC and the American Chamber of Commerce, which are hardly radical, left-wing organisations. They have a similar view on housing and the infrastructural deficit as we have in the Labour Party. They know we face a massive challenge and radical solutions need to be provided. If the Minister of State is not minded to listen to us or the younger citizens wait-

ing for homes, while trapped in homes and often still living with their families into their 30s and 40s with little prospect of getting out, he should listen to IBEC, the American Chamber of Commerce and others.

Nowhere is the gap and difficulties younger people have, in terms of them being a generation which will be less well-off than their parents, better expressed than in terms of access to affordable, sustainable and secure housing. This is part of the solution and I am disappointed this Government is failing to acknowledge that by adopting this legislation now and is kicking the can further down the road.

Deputy Duncan Smith: I am delighted to close this debate. Labour Party Private Members' motions are taking on a familiar pattern. They are getting broad support from the Opposition. In fact, the support was quite effusive from most Opposition spokespeople who opened and closed their contributions with it. In the middle of those contributions is where they get their clips for Facebook and whatever other social media platforms they decide to put their messaging out on. That is the way it is.

However, we know they support it. They support it because this is the right thing to do. Some in opposition do not support it. They have a philosophical view which is contrary to us, in terms of planning. They are entitled to it and are consistent with it, but they are in a very small minority.

We have been bringing this forward for a number of years. The question of why we did not do it in government has been thrown back at us by a number of contributors today. However, we have always tried. Governing during a recession is difficult. Being in government during a unique recession, the worst recession in the history of the State, is especially difficult. The subjective view which was thrown across this House that we have done nothing, or in the view of one Deputy, that we did not build one bloody house, is utterly false.

Spokespeople such as Deputies Ó Broin and O'Callaghan, who were rehearsing their social media video clips in the middle of their contributions, know that. They know Labour did important work on housing. If they do not, it is a level of ignorance which I would not imply; they are both intelligent and experienced. They know we have built houses. Just last night, I received a query on a vaccine from someone who is living in a house the Labour Party supplied the last time we were in government.

When we did have the reigns of housing for a short period of time at the end, we ran through as many Part 8s as county councils were able to do. In Fingal, which I represent, we got a vast number of houses off the ground which came on stream in the past couple of years. Fine Gael Ministers cut the ribbon on them but it was a Labour Minister who delivered them. That is the reality. I have a standing offer to anyone to bring them around to the many estates we built in the short amount of time we had during the worst recession in the State's history.

We have a record which we stand over. The housing assistance payment, HAP, is thrown at us a number of times. The HAP is not a long-term solution but prior to HAP, we had rent supplement. The rent supplement was the biggest poverty trap in the history of this State. If one was on rent supplement, one could not get a job, go out to work, or do anything. One was resigned to a life of poverty. The HAP is not the long-term solution, but it allows people to go out and get a job.

The same councillors for parties which are criticising HAP are the councillors who are on

to the housing departments in every county council up and down the country, begging council officials to get tenants onto HAP. There is rank hypocrisy here.

All these measures we brought through is not the full Labour master plan for housing we would like to get through, because we have always been in government with parties ideologically opposed to us. That is the reality. That is where stuff such as the Kenny report has hit the sands, because parties such as Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil have historically been against it on fundamental ideologically grounds. We have had to operate within that space and do the best we can.

We will take some slings and arrows in the back for the stuff we did not do, but the Opposition also has to tell more sides to the story about the stuff we did do, the houses we did build, the tenancies we did secure and the progress we did make. The Opposition is entitled to its own view but it is not entitled to its own facts on this. I cannot stand here and not say that. We would have been able to do more if the Kenny report had been implemented. That is a fact.

There is broad support for this. The Taoiseach who has entered the Chamber now, said three years ago, as our leader, Deputy Kelly, stated at the start of his contribution, it is morally just to bring in the Kenny report. He said that three years ago. We believe that. He believes that, so let us do it. I ask the Government not to kick the can down 12 months. Let us bring it in now.

An Ceann Comhairle: Our Second Stage debate on the Acquisition of Development Land (Assessment of Compensation) Bill 2021 is complete. We must first consider the amendment in the name of the Minister of State. Is the amendment in the name of the Minister of State agreed to?

Amendment put.

An Ceann Comhairle: Insofar as a vote has been called, it is deferred until the voting time later this evening.

Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I again raise the issue of renters, a group of some 300,000 renters across this State which the Taoiseach's Government is failing badly. Ten months ago, his Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage stripped renters of vital Covid-19 protections. Deputy O'Brien's first act as Minister was to pass the Residential Tenancies and Valuation Act 2020. This ended the blanket ban on rent increases, notices to quit and evictions, which had been introduced by his predecessor. This ban, which was necessary on public health grounds, led to the most dramatic drop in people losing their homes in a decade.

In its place, Deputy O'Brien introduced a highly restrictive and unnecessarily cumbersome protection for a small number of renters only. If a renter had lost income due to Covid-19, was on a Covid-19-related payment, in arrears, at risk of losing his or her tenancy and had submitted a written declaration to the Residential Tenancies Board, he or she was protected from rent increase or eviction.

The renter had to meet all five of those onerous tests, however, or else he or she lost all of

the protections.

When tenants advocacy organisations such as Threshold and those of us in opposition warned that the Minister, Deputy Darragh O'Brien's Bill was too restrictive, we were accused of scaremongering or of playing politics. Figures obtained this week by my colleague, an Teachta Ó Broin, from the Residential Tenancies Board, RTB, prove that far from scaremongering or playing politics, Threshold, the advocates and those of us in the Opposition were right. We now know that since last August, almost 4,000 tenants have received 28-day rent arrears warning letters from their landlords and that 1,100 notices to quit have been issued. Yet, only 475 tenants have submitted this written declaration to the Residential Tenancies Board to protect them from eviction. There are 300,000 registered tenancies in this State and the fact is that the so-called protections introduced by the Minister, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, apply to just 475 of them. That is 475 tenancies out of 300,000. This comes at a time, as the Taoiseach knows, when rents are sky-high and unaffordable for many workers and families. Yet, many have faced rent increases with more increases on the way as landlords roll two years of hikes into one.

It is clear and the evidence demonstrates that the Minister, Deputy Darragh O'Brien's highly restrictive protections are not fit for purpose. In light of data, facts and experience, does the Taoiseach accept that the Government's policy has failed renters? Is the Taoiseach willing, as a matter of urgency, to reintroduce the blanket ban on rent increases and evictions for all renters until at least the end of this year?

The Taoiseach: I do not accept the arguments or assertions put forward by the Deputy. The Minister, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, is working proactively to protect renters and the legislation he introduced did just that. The 475 people who applied did so because they were vulnerable as a result of Covid-19 and they then received the protections that were provided under the Planning and Development, and Residential Tenancies Act 2020. Those protections are available up until 12 July. I anticipate that the Minister will extend those protections for tenants and renters through legislation up until January 2022. The rent pressure zone, RPZ, framework is due to expire at the end of 2021 and the Minister will also have proposals on that. A rent arrears notice does not always result in an eviction notice, as the Deputy is well aware.

I would also point out to the Deputy that something else we have to take on board is that the number of landlords registered with the RTB reduced by 3,857 in 2020. That is a significant contraction in the market so there is a balance to be struck. The Minister wants to deal with both the rent increase issue and with ensuring protection for renters. The strong advice to the Minister has been that a blanket ban on rent increases of any duration would be the subject of a legal challenge and would almost certainly deter continued investment in the rental accommodation market.

I read Deputy Ó Broin's comments today. He wants the ban extended for another six months so even he in his commentary accepts that there cannot be a rent freeze forever. The difference between what the Deputy is saying and what the Government's position is seems to be six months. The Government's advice and the Minister's advice have been strongly that a blanket ban on rent increases would be subject to a legal challenge and that it does not in itself grow the rental accommodation market either. We need more accommodation, housing supply and affordable housing.

We are making significant progress on the homelessness front. Some 1,364 adults and their

dependents exited emergency accommodation or were prevented from entering into emergency accommodation in the first quarter of 2021. The Housing First programme is providing homeless people with high support needs with 539 active Housing First tenancies nationwide. We know that a notice of termination served does not always result in an eviction. A landlord often serves a notice of termination but does not follow through on it or it can be averted or dealt with. We will do everything we possibly can to protect tenants and a range of supports are available to protect tenants, including the legal supports and legislation the Minister has brought in and will extend for tenants to the beginning of next year. The parallel with that will be a continuing focus on reducing the number of people in family homelessness, which has come down by 31% on the total recorded in April 2020. Since the start of 2021, a total of 324 families in Dublin have exited emergency accommodation. Ultimately, we do not want people falling into any situation where eviction becomes the norm. On a range of policies, we have to do everything we possibly can to prevent evictions and to support those who are renting. That is what we intend to do.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Taoiseach says he does not claim my assertions but I am not making personal assertions. The figures do not lie so let me repeat them for the Taoiseach. Almost 4,000 rent arrears warning letters have been sent; over 1,000 notices to quit have been served; and just 475 renters have been protected from a total population of 300,000 registered tenancies. The Government's scheme has failed. That is the fact. The Government's job is to protect all renters who are subjected to extortionate rents and huge insecurity at the time of a massive housing emergency that we suffer and endure, not least because of the Taoiseach's previous time in office.

Is the Taoiseach prepared to do what is necessary? Make no mistake but that what is necessary is the reintroduction of the blanket ban on rent increases, which the Government can do. A ban on notices to quit and evictions is also necessary, at least until the end of this year. The Government should give renters some comfort, protection and assurance that their Government acts for them and is not totally consumed by the interests of developers and landlords.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy has no substance to her policies and she has no solutions to the housing problem. Sinn Féin wants a blanket ban on evictions and a rent freeze for another six months only with no focus at all on what that will do in growing the number of houses that are available to rent. I told the Deputy earlier that 3,857 fewer houses are available for rent in 2020. That is a significant contraction in the market. The Deputy seems to want to push it down even more and make fewer houses available. Sinn Féin does not really have a coherent medium-term housing policy and it seems always to want to exploit the housing issue. We need supply and to build more houses. The cost rental initiative the Minister has introduced, which will provide up to 500 houses this year at 25% below market value, is the type of initiative we need. We need to increase dramatically those numbers.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Taoiseach; the time is up.

The Taoiseach: When the Land Development Agency legislation is passed we will have capacity to increase dramatically the supply of cost rental accommodation, along with more affordable housing and serviced sites.

An Ceann Comhairle: The time is up, please. As I am trying to keep everyone on time, the Taoiseach should please conclude.

The Taoiseach: I am more into solutions to the housing problem. I am not trying to make it worse, which Sinn Féin is in the proposals it is advocating.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Two reports published today highlight that the State continues to heap disadvantage on disadvantage in the treatment of vulnerable children. The Ombudsman for Children has published a hugely concerning report about the impact of the pandemic on children in general. In the report, the ombudsman describes 2020 as a devastating year for children, which it was. Schools and sports facilities closed while other activities came to an abrupt halt. Children could not see their families or friends. All the normal and joyful events were stripped away.

Vulnerable children's safety nets were also stripped away. The digital divide impacted children's right to education. The number of child protection referrals fell by a staggering 42%, meaning children living in unsafe homes or at risk of violence fell through the cracks. While available supports from social workers and teachers collapsed, domestic violence rates soared. Children with additional needs did not have access to their usual services or routines and very many of them regressed. Children awaiting medical treatment or an assessment of need for disability services have joined rapidly expanding waiting lists. Children living with parents or siblings who are medically at high risk lived in fear of bringing Covid-19 home and causing the death of their family member. Many of these children felt unable to attend school for that reason and 15 months later, many are still not attending school.

Another report published today has highlighted the difficulties faced by children born into disadvantaged backgrounds. The latest research from the Growing Up in Ireland study looks at 8,000 nine-year-olds and their families. The report describes how gaps have widened between children from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds since the children started at primary school. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds who were early high performers in school were being outperformed by children from wealthier backgrounds by the age of nine. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds had lower reading test scores and more negative self-perception, poorer health outcomes and more socio-emotional difficulties. Those children are being knowingly failed by the State.

The pandemic has caused considerable disruption to every child in Ireland but it has taken a particularly heavy toll on the most disadvantaged children because it has exacerbated underlying structural inequalities that have persisted for far too long. I know that the Taoiseach understands how such disadvantage can rob children of their childhoods and potential. I ask the Taoiseach and his office to take the lead with a comprehensive response to mitigate the damage that has been done to many vulnerable children.

The Taoiseach: There is no doubt but that the impact of Covid-19 has been severe on children. It is a once in a century pandemic, which has turned everybody's world upside down, but that is particularly true for children. It has led to isolation at a family level. Children born in the past year, for example, have not been able to see their wider families which is important, at a basic level, for socialisation and its importance in the early development of a child. Schools were closed for different periods during the first lockdown and the third wave of the pandemic earlier this year. The Government has done everything it possibly can to support children throughout the pandemic, not least in getting schools reopened last September, which involved unprecedented investment in resources for primary and secondary schools and childcare settings to enable the return of services and schools. A range of supports was provided to enable that to happen. Unfortunately, the third wave interrupted that in the first quarter of the year

but, thankfully, we were able to get kids back into school. It is a measure of our society compared to other countries, in that we were in a position to more consistently prioritise education for children above and beyond other sectors of society or the economy. We imposed localised lockdowns in the run-up to September last year. That was not popular but we did it to ensure we could facilitate the restart of education in September and could carry it on through the rest of the year. That was an important policy objective and priority.

The Deputy mentioned disadvantage and the digital divide and what she said is true. My initial feedback was that the online experience was difficult and challenging for schools to operate although it was better the second time around during the third wave. People got to learn more and improve their *modus operandi*, practices and so on. However, nothing ever replaces the personal interaction between a teacher and a child or a special needs assistant and a child in the classroom. That said, we have now, as part of the recovery and resilience programme and in our submission to Europe, identified a significant investment in technology for education including high-speed connectivity and the deployment of devices. That investment is heavily weighted towards supporting children in circumstances of socioeconomic disadvantage. The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, DEIS, programme has been a significant intervention. It was brought in by Fianna Fáil when it was last in government. I have had a long and consistent position in terms of addressing educational disadvantage. I was involved in developing the original school completion programme when I was Minister for Education and Science. That is being reviewed at the moment and we need to refine it to ensure we target the children who are most in need. The digital transformation programme is about dealing with digital disadvantage.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: We already have an unacceptably high number of children who are disadvantaged. Those children have been doubly disadvantaged over the past year and we need a comprehensive response to their particular circumstances. I am asking the Taoiseach to take the lead on this because it involves a number of different Departments. These issues touch on education, child welfare and health. All of the agencies with responsibility in those areas need to be brought together to devise an immediate and urgent response to the particular problems that have been caused. I am asking the Taoiseach to take the lead on that.

The Taoiseach: The Government and I are very clear in prioritising the needs of children. The Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Deputy O’Gorman, will be to the fore in advancing the issues that fall within his remit. The same applies to the Minister for Education, Deputy Foley. We will be working together. We work collaboratively through the sub-committees on social affairs and education, as we must.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: The Taoiseach needs to take responsibility.

The Taoiseach: I take responsibility as Taoiseach, as I do all the time in respect of advancing policies that are beneficial to children-----

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Will the Taoiseach produce a plan?

The Taoiseach: -----and that is what we intend to do. There is no question but that Covid-19 had an unprecedented impact on children and we accept that. It was a damaging impact.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Will the Taoiseach produce a plan?

The Taoiseach: We need action across the board and I am keen on that. We are doing that.

We have already published the economic recovery plan, which focuses strongly on children and young people in terms of the allocation of resources to support them in the time ahead.

Deputy Noel Grealish: There are grants for nearly all sporting organisations through the sports capital programme and the large scale sports infrastructure fund, which I welcome. However, one sector seems to fall outside any State support scheme, which is community centres. Many towns and villages across the country have community centres that were built with the support of the State over the years. However, there is no financial support available now for new projects.

I will give the Taoiseach an example of such a project. Newcastle is a community of more than 6,000 people on the west side of Galway city and under the chairmanship of Mr. Seamus Davey, a committee got together, raised over €2,000, acquired a site and secured planning permission for a much-needed centre for the area. The project is now shovel-ready and awaiting funding to commence construction. It has the unanimous support of Galway City Council. The council will commit a minimum of €900,000 towards the €3.8 million building cost of the project. That leaves a shortfall of €2.9 million. There has long been a need for such a facility in the Newcastle and neighbouring Dangan areas, especially since the only hotel in the area, a focal point for the community, closed in recent years. It was demolished to make way for student accommodation. Bear in mind that the population of the area in question is similar to that of towns such as Ballinasloe, Fermoy, Westport and Roscommon that are well serviced with such facilities. It is also a maturing area. According to the 2016 census, almost one third of the population of Newcastle was over 60 years of age. People in the area need a facility like this within easy reach of their homes. The need for somewhere to meet up with their neighbours, enjoy social activities or take further educational courses will become more pronounced as the population matures further. All that is needed is adequate funding for this project. Those involved have ambitious plans to contribute to the health and wellness of the local community, as well as providing educational opportunities and accommodating sporting activity. They are determined to make sure that the community centre is viable in the long-term by means of measures to generate income for the service provider to cover operating costs.

I have been working with the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, for the past number of months but he tells me there is no funding available for such a project. I know there are many demands on public funds, but will the Taoiseach give a commitment to set up a community centre fund that will provide financial support to the likes of the Newcastle Combined Community Association in order that it can build the much-needed community centre in question?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising an issue that is very close to my heart, to be honest, in terms of what I see as an historic gap in the allocation of funding to community facilities. Whereas we have historically and traditionally allocated grants and lottery funding for sports facilities, there has never really been a dedicated capital fund nationally for community centres. It is my view that there should be such a fund. Indeed, a commitment in this regard is included in the programme for Government. I would, however, like that commitment to be even more expansive than it is in the programme for Government. We need to move on this matter. Very often, as a result of the kind of gap to which I refer, the proposers or patrons of various schemes have had to take different circuitous routes to try to secure funding, be it by means of an application for a sports grant made through a sporting facility within a community centre or, for example, via the community development supports available from local authorities.

In Newcastle, Mr. Seamus Davey and the community association have been doing the groundwork. The Deputy indicated that Galway City Council has come up with approximately €900,000, which, to be fair, is a substantial amount. What I would favour is a tripartite partnership involving the Government, local authorities and communities to put together the wherewithal to enable either the enhancement of existing community facilities, extensions to such facilities or new facilities in large and developing areas and places such as Newcastle that have large populations. As the Deputy stated, the Newcastle area is home to approximately 6,000 people.

We put together the community enhancement fund, which is primarily for disadvantaged communities. Approximately €2 million was allocated in respect of this fund, which was launched in June of last year. In the second round of funding last August, an additional €5 million was allocated to the Department of Rural and Community Development under the July stimulus package. Again, following through on the programme for Government, I was anxious to give additional money to communities. Community organisations have been very effective in responding to Covid-19. The purpose of that funding was to provide grants for community centres and community facilities. It was targeted at measures that would stimulate local communities while enhancing community facilities. Some 3,000 projects were supported through the 2020 community enhancement programme, including more than 1,400 under the second round, which was targeted at community centres and facilities.

The 2021 community enhancement programme was launched in May, with funding of approximately €4.5 million. That is from the Department of Rural and Community Development and is open to all community groups. Perhaps the scale of allocation there may not be sufficient for the project the Deputy has outlined but it is something on which we can build. As we both agree, there is currently no dedicated stand-alone funding stream for capital works for community centres. The Department of Rural and Community Development accepts the principle and believes that there is benefit in the introduction of a dedicated community centre capital programme to provide large-scale capital grants for significant refurbishment, retrofitting and modernisation works across the network of community centre infrastructure. That work is under way in the context of the review of the national development plan, which is being undertaken by my colleague, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Michael McGrath. In addition, there is the programming being done in respect of the European Regional Development Fund and the work the Department is doing in that regard. That is something on which we will be working.

Deputy Noel Grealish: I thank the Taoiseach for his response. As we all know, however, community centres play a very important role in communities. They can incorporate day-care centres and offer places where young people and others can meet. I am sure that this does not just apply to Galway and that it is prevalent elsewhere. In the particular area to which I refer, however, there is nothing for the more than 6,000 people who live there. The only facility there was a hotel and that was knocked down in order to make way for new student accommodation erected.

The local people got together and raised more than €200,000, a huge amount of money, to get the project through the planning process to a point where it is now shovel-ready. Galway City Council is 100% on board. It has decided to give those involved with the project more than €900,000. I am sure that if we went to the council we would probably get more money from it. There is a shortfall in funding and the community cannot raise the amount involved.

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I agree with the Taoiseach. There should be a group working on this matter. I ask that something be done in the short term, not the long term. Do not kick this ball down the road. This area needs a community centre, as do, I am sure, many other areas throughout the country. I welcome the grant that was introduced during the pandemic, which was used to refurbish and repair many community centres. Unfortunately, as the Taoiseach stated, there is no fund for the building of community centres. Why not make this a pilot project? Will the Taoiseach come back to the House in the short term with some sort of proposal to allow us to build this much-needed facility.

The Taoiseach: I commend the Deputy on an audacious move to secure a pilot project for Newcastle. I will talk to the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Deputy Humphreys, and the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, again to see what we can do in conjunction with the local authority and to discover whether we can provide some supports for what has clearly been a project developed, from the ground up, by the community in Newcastle. The community activists and leaders there really have the vision to provide a first-class facility for their community. The Deputy put the matter very well in his presentation to the House. I will certainly pursue that with the Ministers involved to see whether, in conjunction with the local authority, we can do more to make sure that what is a shovel-ready project can actually be brought to fruition.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Taoiseach very much. Finally, we move to Deputy Nolan on behalf of the Rural Independent Group.

Deputy Carol Nolan: As we all know, the impact of Covid-19 on the delivery of health services in the State has been catastrophic. We also know that waiting lists across nearly all medical specialties have increased significantly and that it will be years before we can finally determine the real magnitude of the crisis that has been created in non-Covid-related areas such as cancer, coronary and paediatric care. It also needs to be pointed out, however, that it was wrong of this Government to decide to close down cancer services during the pandemic while the restrictions were in place. Many medical experts asked for the services to remain open and they should have done.

There was another crisis in the making well before Covid-19 was even heard of and it is one that cannot and should not be cloaked by the focus on the pandemic. I am referring to the scandal that is the delivery of the national children's hospital project. This project was originally budgeted at €650 million. The cost escalated to €1.74 billion, with the most recent estimate now reported to be in excess of €2 billion. In February, the chief executive of the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board told the Committee of Public Accounts that the hospital is not likely to be fully operational until 2024. This is a full two years after the original contractual end point of 2022.

We were also told in February that more than 700 claims have been lodged by various contractors against the project, with the amount associated with these thought to be in excess of €300 million. This project has become a chaotic financial albatross and a health nightmare. It will inevitably drain vital and much-needed resources away from other areas of healthcare. How could it not, given the scale of the moneys involved? It is a fact that this project will, at the very least, end up being €1 billion over budget before a sick child is even seen. To put into context what €1 billion euros could do in the area of health, I was informed, through a reply to a recent parliamentary question, that the total cost of implementing the entire national cancer strategy between now and 2026 would be in the region of €840 million. I am also aware that

the total net budget for adults' and children's palliative care last year was just over €100 million. That leaves us with €60 million that could be utilised. It is infuriating that the Taoiseach and his party, and the previous Government, had two opportunities to call a halt to this. In March 2017 and March 2019, the Rural Independent Group brought the issue to the Government's attention and called for a radical reassessment of the project.

The Taoiseach: First, I want to say to the Deputy that the health service has performed heroically during Covid-19 in dealing with the impact of the disease. The front-line workers right through to the administrators and senior management have worked very hard, night and day, to protect the people of this country. No services were restricted or closed down without the most serious consideration being given to the well-being of patients. Cancer services were not closed down in their entirety. Even during the first phase, they were not closed down. A whole range of issues happened, of course, in terms of screening programmes and so on and that has caused problems and challenges. There will be significant pressure on the health services now in terms of the restoration of services. In fact, hospitals right now are busier than they were even at the highest levels of activity in 2019. In a way, that is a good thing in terms of people coming back. We need to have a substantial programme to deal with delayed diagnoses and make sure we can accelerate programmes of intervention, diagnostics and so forth. That is something the Minister for Health, his Department and the HSE are very focused on. We have allocated significant funding specifically for the restoration of cancer services in the context of Covid-19 and services more generally.

In regard to the national children's hospital, the situation is well known. The Deputy said we had an opportunity to address it in 2017 and 2019, but we were not in government then. She needs to define what she means by a radical reappraisal or approach to this. She needs to spell out what she means because it is not clear.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It is the wrong site.

The Taoiseach: Does she mean stopping the project in its entirety? That is all done. The site was chosen independently a long time ago. Obviously, the objective now is to build a first-class paediatric hospital for the children of this country and for future generations. There have been very significant challenges in the context of the site and that is no secret. There have been significant issues and the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board is undertaking an ongoing review of the project and is engaging with the Minister for Health and his Department. The Government continues to keep this matter under review. There remain challenges and the relationships between contractors and the development board have been challenging. We are dealing with the matter incrementally and on an ongoing basis. There is no magic wand that we can wave at this stage in regard to the project but we will stoically deal with it on a proper basis on behalf of the citizens of the country.

Deputy Carol Nolan: I thank the Taoiseach for his response. Our healthcare staff certainly were commendable and did a fantastic job. This chaos we have is not of their making. However, an expert in cancer care, Professor O'Reilly, has pointed out that we will see higher numbers of cancer patients for the next decade because services that should have been operational, including screening services, were not operational and, unfortunately, there will be delayed diagnoses.

I want to point out to the Taoiseach that when I call for a radical reassessment, I am talking about a very reasonable proposal to carry out an impact assessment and a re-evaluation of

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healthcare priorities and objectives. It is unfair that hundreds of millions will be taken out of healthcare while children are languishing on hospital waiting lists. I refer to children with scoliosis who need treatment, children who need audiology services and children who need speech and language therapy. It is those children who are suffering.

The Taoiseach: I appreciate the Deputy's concerns. By the way, I know Professor O'Reilly and he is an exceptional oncologist, if it is the same person we are talking about. Covid has had this impact, not the Government. Governments do not want to close down services willy-nilly. There is no agenda. We have allocated more resources to the health service in 2021 than ever before. Historic amounts have been allocated to health. The winter initiative plan alone, with €600 million in funding that we gave in advance to the HSE in October, was critical to facilitating the health services throughout the Christmas period and particularly during the third wave. That intervention was, perhaps, one of the most effective proactive interventions in quite a while. It did not get much attention because of the third wave and all that happened subsequently.

I am still at a loss as to what the Deputy is saying in terms of the children's hospital and a radical reappraisal. We cannot pull hundreds of millions out of that now. The topping out has happened and so forth. The Deputy needs to make a call here. What is she actually recommending to the Government? Is she saying we should pull the project? Is she saying we should reduce the scale of the project? I am unclear on this.

Deputy Carol Nolan: There needs to be an assessment.

The Taoiseach: I do not know what that means.

An Ceann Comhairle: The time is up.

Ceisteanna ar Reachtaíocht a Gealladh - Questions on Promised Legislation

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Yesterday, a very dangerous and provocative march by thousands of flag-bearing Israeli ultra-nationalists and pro-settlers in East Jerusalem once again caused tensions to flare. This march was undoubtedly a show of force, with chanting of anti-Palestinian slogans, some of them deeply disturbing, such as "Death to Arabs" and "May your village burn". Unsurprisingly, this led to violence once again in Gaza and Israeli airstrikes have resumed. This is very troubling because the current ceasefire must be maintained and the violence must end. Has the Government engaged with the new Israeli Administration to relay the view of this Dáil, as recently expressed, regarding illegal settlement-building in Palestine and that these actions amount to *de facto* annexation and must cease? What progress has been made on that?

The Taoiseach: I am aware of the airstrikes overnight in response to the incendiary balloons launched from Gaza. We want all sides to respect the ceasefire. It is important that the ceasefire is made permanent and is long-term in nature, for the benefit of all the people across the entire region. All efforts must be made to ensure that is the case and we will be communicating that to the new Israeli Government. We wish the new Prime Minister and his Government the very best and hope their election will mark a change of direction. We want, as a country, to have a

constructive engagement with the Israeli Government but we have been very consistent in our views, which we articulated to the previous Government and will articulate to the new Government, in respect of the resolution of the long-standing conflict in Palestine and the need for a two-state solution.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I want to raise the issue of community employment, CE, schemes. In my county, Tipperary, I have had a range of people contact me on this issue. Last week, David Mulvaney in Ballynacargy, County Westmeath, eloquently outlined the situation there to me whereby if these schemes are not extended, many people whom the ESB is pushing towards getting major awards under the CE programme will simply not have enough time to complete their training. Given that this issue affects thousands of people, will the Taoiseach consider extending the programme in order that people can finish their training, get their awards and complete their year? They have not been able to do so because of Covid. As part of this, will the Taoiseach consider the provision of more resources temporarily while the schemes get restarted in the new environment under Covid? Finally, will he look at the whole package to ensure we can have consistency in the CE schemes and the work they do in communities across Ireland, which we all acknowledge is very valuable?

The Taoiseach: I will certainly engage with the Minister on the issues the Deputy has raised. I have been a long-standing supporter of CE schemes, which have had a huge impact on communities the length and breadth of the country. I will certainly revert back to the Deputy.

Deputy Holly Cairns: Does the Government stand over the report of the Commission of Investigation into the Mother and Baby Homes, as it claims it does in the High Court, or does it believe there are such fundamental problems with it that it is now necessary to authorise a separate review of the report, as the Minister has now said? The Chief State Solicitor's office submitted statements opposing judicial reviews being granted because it says these women seeking judicial reviews are not identifiable in the report. The Taoiseach can obviously see the inherent and very blatant contradiction in the Government's approach. It cannot simultaneously defend the report and suggest it is so fundamentally flawed that a separate review of the report is now required. Which is it?

The Taoiseach: First, I do not support or accept the Deputy's assertions in terms of-----

Deputy Holly Cairns: Does he accept that the Chief State Solicitor-----

The Taoiseach: I did not interrupt Deputy Cairns. I am entitled to the right of reply. I answer people as they ask questions here. I do not accept the assertion the Deputy made. I make the point that the commission was established by this House. Her party supported the establishment of the commission. Her party supported the legislative framework that governed the establishment of the commission-----

Deputy Holly Cairns: Will he answer the question, please?

The Taoiseach: This is the key. This is the core of the issue. The more fundamental point-----

Deputy Holly Cairns: My question is does the Taoiseach stand over the report or does he believe it is so fundamentally flawed we need a fundamental review.

An Ceann Comhairle: You have asked your question, Deputy Cairns. Please let the Tao-

iseach answer without interruption.

Deputy Holly Cairns: This is affecting people's judicial review hearings.

The Taoiseach: What is important here is we do not have the wherewithal. We created these commissions of investigation into a whole range of issues. The Mother and Baby Homes investigation was under the aegis of a commission of investigation. It is independent of the Oireachtas and of the Government with respect to its findings and its content. We may disagree on the content of any given report-----

Deputy Holly Cairns: With two reports that potentially contradict each other, which one does the Taoiseach stand over?

The Taoiseach: The Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Deputy O'Gorman, is going to deal with this in terms of ensuring a voice for the survivors in respect of those testimonies contained in the confidential report.

An Ceann Comhairle: The time is up, Taoiseach. I am sorry.

Deputy Holly Cairns: That should be acknowledged in the High Court because that is not what the Chief State Solicitor is saying.

The Taoiseach: No, the Deputy is being disingenuous on this. That is what I have to say now on that.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am sorry but we must conclude on this matter.

The Taoiseach: I do not want any conflict on this. We want to try to get to a solution-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Yes, can we conclude please?

The Taoiseach: -----and we are going to implement the key recommendations which we have already made great progress on-----

Deputy Holly Cairns: The Government cannot stand over-----

The Taoiseach: -----in terms of information and tracing with the report.

Deputy Holly Cairns: It is so fundamentally flawed that the Government needs a separate review.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am sorry, Deputy. It is not in order to continue to hector the Taoiseach. Can we please adhere to the timelines? I call Deputy Paul Murphy.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I thank the Ceann Comhairle. That was a cop-out by the Taoiseach.

Last week's details of a so-called rental protection Bill suggested this would be a plan to stop the double rent hikes many tenants are facing in the next month, but the details of the plan fail to address the actual scale of the problem. Hundreds of thousands of tenants are living in fear of rent hikes of €150 or €200 per month but the Government's proposal will only protect a few hundred. Worse still, even for those few hundred, it kicks the can down the road to January and does not stop landlords imposing this year's rent hikes, and last year's, at that point in time by up to 12%. If one accepts an 8% rent increase is unaffordable then surely one can see the problem with a triple hike. As well as a wave of rent increases we are seeing a wave of evic-

tions now the eviction ban is lifted. Over 1,000 households have been given an eviction notice in the past ten months. That will become a tsunami of evictions unless real action is taken. Will the Taoiseach take action to deal with this issue?

The Taoiseach: Yes. As I said earlier, the Minister with responsibility for housing will be extending the legislation to protect tenants and protect those who are vulnerable because of Covid-19 and its impact on their incomes, with 475 people having availed of that protection to date. It is not open to the Minister, either constitutionally or legally, to have a blanket ban on rent increases. It simply is not open to him. However, he will be bringing proposals before the House in relation to these rental issues.

Deputy Michael Lowry: There is currently a detailed and constructive submission with the Department seeking funding under the national development plan, NDP, to ensure the future of residential care at Dean Maxwell Community Nursing Unit, Roscrea. Doubts continue to loom over this valued and cherished facility. I appreciate that the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste have acknowledged the need of Roscrea and that it deserves a residential elderly care unit. Its future is dependent on the successful outcome to the community submission under the NDP. That will determine if those in need of elderly care will be able to access a facility in their own town with daily visits from family and friends. Exclusion from the plan will force elderly care out of Roscrea to Nenagh, with all the disruption and inconvenience that entails. What is the status and the timeline for the NDP review? Can the Taoiseach ensure Roscrea will be included in the plan? Is it the case that each Department receives an allocation under the plan and is subsequently responsible for the determination of which projects will be selected for funding?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this very important and pertinent issue. He, along with other Deputies from County Tipperary, has been consistent on its importance. Obviously, high-quality public investment is key to enhancing health services and the broader economic recovery in locations across the country. Basically, the NDP review is continuing. I know the Roscrea Community Development Council has made a submission to the public consultation on the review of the NDP. Copies were sent to a number of Government Departments so Ministers are aware of this project. The submission proposes capital investment be made to build a new Dean Maxwell care home and community hub, and there are a number of Oireachtas Members from County Tipperary who support this proposal. I understand the eagerness and advocacy from the Deputy and from all the local representatives who want progress on this new facility. Yes, the allocation will go to Government Departments and agencies. Suffice it to say those agencies and Departments are well aware of the interest in this facility.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: On this issue of community halls the Taoiseach addressed earlier, Newcastle Community Hall had an excellent submission for funding under urban and village renewal, under the stewardship of Ms Marian O'Dwyer. The hall got 80% funding in late 2018. The 20%, which was €35,000, then had to be made up. With sterling work and ingenuity the €35,000 has been raised. Now the dilemma is that because of the delay the group must retender the project. As the Taoiseach knows, thanks to many Government policies the cost of building material and works has escalated hugely, so there is still a shortfall. I raised this with the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Deputy Humphreys, before and she gave me no solace. The group raised the money itself, in the teeth of Covid, and it is a credit to them. However, now it is out to tender and the group is worried the prices coming back will probably be 30% to 40% above the original cost. We must support those communities. Ní neart go cur le chéile. The hall is there since 1973, since the late Bridie Coleman bought it off the vocational educational committee, VEC, and set up a community centre. Extra funding is needed for these

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facilities in order to have them for the community's use.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising the issue. I think I was in that hall.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: He was. I brought him in and gave him tea.

The Taoiseach: I think the Deputy invited me, at that time.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I did, and he agreed to come.

The Taoiseach: The tea was very good.

Deputy Denis Naughten: Did he drink it?

The Taoiseach: I did.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: He did.

An Ceann Comhairle: I hope it was green.

The Taoiseach: As Deputy Mattie McGrath said, 80% of the funding was allocated and to be fair to the community, they raised €35,000. We will keep the situation under review in terms of what the tender price comes in at. We will see what can happen and work with the local authority there as well.

Deputy Michael McNamara: In response to between 300 and 500 jobs being at risk at Lufthansa Technik in Shannon, the Minister for Transport announced another task force for Shannon. That comes 12 months after the aviation task force reported, with none of its recommendations being implemented in the interim.

Meanwhile, we are implementing the EU digital green certificate without the use of antigen testing and we are an outlier in the European Union in that regard. The Ferguson report, prepared by the Chief Scientific Adviser to the Government the Taoiseach leads, has not even been discussed by NPHE. According to NPHE's minutes, it was never tabled or discussed. At the same time, tens of millions of euro are being paid every month to a laboratory for PCR testing, the director of which laboratory sits on NPHE. I ask the Taoiseach who is running this country and for whose benefit?

The Taoiseach: The task force on Shannon was advocated long before the most recent employment issues. Something was committed to on the Government's formation, and it is a wider issue, particularly in the context of developing the entire estuary. We are conscious of the policies on fossil fuels and non-provision of fossil fuel infrastructure so we want to look at alternative infrastructure that can generate employment and help economic recovery in the Shannon area. Offshore wind is an example, along with other developments of that kind. That genuinely is the reason we are setting up the task force for the Shannon region. It can be helpful as a catalyst for economic recovery in the region and projecting ahead for the future.

On the question of antigen testing, the chief scientific adviser has concluded a report and the majority was in favour of the more widespread use of antigen testing. The Deputy is correct that public health authorities are less enthused by it. At the same time we are rolling that out in different sectors of society. There is a pilot project in higher education.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: Following the murder of Keane Mulready-Woods in Drogheda

a year ago, there was a major Garda response that has been very successful, with a significant increase in the number of full-time gardaí in our town. At the same time an inquiry was set up by Mr. Vivian Geiran, the former head of the Probation Service, into what needs to change in our area to provide resources to beat criminals and put them away as long as possible.

One of the resource issues identified was inadequate Garda support in east Meath, with more than 20,000 people having no access to a full-time Garda station. Members of the Garda there operate from a bungalow and if there is an issue, they must ring Ashbourne or Duleek to get support. It is not that the Garda does not wish to get the service but rather that resources are not there.

Recently, over two weekends there were very serious public order incidents, with a serious assault of a young person. The Garda must be able to respond. The Garda Commissioner is aware of this.

An Ceann Comhairle: The point has been made.

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd: We need action on the Geiran report. We need a full-time Garda station in east Meath.

The Taoiseach: I fully accept that issues have arisen, particularly with regard to the horrific murder of Keane Mulready-Woods. It is important to point out that Garda resources have increased significantly in the area over the past number of years. There are now 331 gardaí in the area as of March this year, compared with 277 in 2015. There has been an increase in Garda resources.

There must be a multi-agency response to questions not just of crime but of assistance to young people who are facing difficult challenges. It is something the Government is committed to and we will examine it further. We will keep in touch with the Deputy on that.

Deputy Johnny Guirke: On 28 January, I raised with the Tánaiste the question of reservoirs in Enfield, Longwood and Ballivor, County Meath, and every week since there have been water interruptions in all these villages. Even this week in Ballivor there were interruptions in the water supply three or four times, meaning the children were going to school with uniforms being wiped down rather than washed and people are unable to have showers. People are also spending a lot of money on water from the shops.

This has gone on for years. In fairness to Meath County Council, it has planning in place for these three new reservoirs. There is a design in place and a contractor in place. The council is waiting on Irish Water to release €1.5 million for the project. People are sick and tired of the standard response from Irish Water. Will the Taoiseach write to Irish Water and ask it to release the funding for these three reservoirs in Longwood, Enfield and Ballivor as a matter of urgency? Access to water is a basic human right.

The Taoiseach: The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Michael McGrath, allocated significant additional resources to Irish Water in 2020, particularly in the July stimulus programme, as well as in the Estimates for 2021. Of course, the objective of the allocation of those resources was to enhance water infrastructure, including reservoir provision, waste water treatment plants and so forth. I hope that those resources can be provided in this case in order that the necessary work can get the green light.

Deputy Aindrias Moynihan: There are people aged between 60 and 69 who have received an initial dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine and they are very concerned that they remain exposed and not fully vaccinated, especially as they have seen the Delta variant ravaging the UK. These people have been very careful during the various lockdowns but are very concerned they could be exposed. They are asking for this concern to be recognised so they could be prioritised to be fully vaccinated.

Changing the interval between doses would be helpful but it still means many people will not be fully vaccinated until late in July. It is a real worry, especially when we consider many of these are vulnerable older people. They are asking if the mixing of vaccines, including the likes of the Pfizer vaccine, could be considered so they could be fully vaccinated sooner.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising what is a very important question. I urge everybody called for their second vaccine dose to take that dose. It is the best protection we can give to one another and it is extremely important that this happens. The HSE has brought forward the interval for the second dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine so by mid-July, all that age cohort should have their second dose of AstraZeneca. That is a significant advance on what was originally planned. It will give up to 92% protection against the Delta variant, which is important.

The national immunisation advisory committee, NIAC, has not recommended the mixing of vaccines and the committee has said it is important that people take the vaccine available to them as soon as that is offered. Once the AstraZeneca programme is concluded, we will be down to the two mRNA vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna.

Deputy Bríd Smith: The Taoiseach knows that next Monday will mark a year from the tragic death of Noah Donohoe, whose body was found in Belfast and whose family have had no answers about his death. This was a teenager tragically found dead after a long search. I know the family has requested a meeting with the Taoiseach and People Before Profit stands squarely behind the family's pursuit of justice and an inquiry. We also stand behind the campaigners, who are called "Noah's army". Today the Dáil should demonstrate its solidarity with the Donohoe family and the campaign. Will the Taoiseach tell us what progress he is making in responding to the family's request for a meeting? Will he expedite the request so the campaign and family can finally see a full, thorough and accountable investigation into the tragic circumstances that led to the death of Noah Donohoe last year?

The Taoiseach: Noah Donohoe's death was very sad and tragic. My understanding is the authorities in Northern Ireland have been pursuing this investigation and the degree to which this jurisdiction can have an impact on that investigation is clearly limited. I will revert on seeing what we can do to expedite a meeting with the family.

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan: In view of the critical role played by the agrifood sector in this country in the economic recovery following the financial crash, will due regard now be given to the sustainability of the dairy and beef sector in this country and the need to ensure it can be protected through the Common Agricultural Policy and other means and that the proposed Mercosur agreement or the related importation of food into Europe will not undermine the sustainability of Irish products?

The Taoiseach: The Mercosur agreement as it currently stands is not consistent with European Union climate change objectives and trade deals must be consistent with those objectives.

Given the rampant deforestation of the land in the Amazon region, it seems clear the Brazilian Government is not serious about addressing climate issues.

The dairy industry is a strong industry in Ireland. It provides thousands of jobs in rural Ireland and across the regions. It produces high-quality output in milk and baby formula, which provide great sustenance across the world for many families. We will continue to support the industry.

Deputy Claire Kerrane: Last week, the Alzheimer Society of Ireland published its research report on caring and coping with dementia during Covid-19. The report found family carers to be at breaking point, with their mental and physical well-being seriously affected. More than half of family carers were worried about how they would continue to cope. Carers spoke about the loss of day services, about community services being cut off overnight and of feeling like they were being left at the back of the queue for vaccines. Family carers have made enormous sacrifices to keep those they care for safe during this time. Many of the report's recommendations were mirrored in the Sinn Féin motion that was passed in this House at the end of March. They include the need for emotional supports such as counselling, as well as the need to prioritise the resumption of day care services and double expenditure for respite to ensure carers can access these vital supports. Will the Taoiseach act on the motion passed in this House at the end of March, with the support of his Government, to immediately support family carers who are at breaking point?

The Taoiseach: I commend the Minister of State, Deputy Mary Butler, on the very proactive role she has played in dealing with dementia. She has followed through on the role she played while in opposition when she did some great work with former Senator Colette Kelleher in producing a groundbreaking report. The Minister of State has followed through in implementing the report's recommendations in her first year in her role.

I always regret that attempts were made to politicise the vaccination programme. Sinn Féin has never resiled from endeavouring to do that. No one was left behind in the vaccination programme and it is wrong to say that. The Deputy's party seems absolutely hell-bent on undermining the genuine efforts that everybody is making to vaccinate the population for crass political reasons. I regret that. It is a consistent theme of Sinn Féin and it is not right.

Deputy Denis Naughten: Every year, families are dragged through the courts at significant personal and financial cost to them and to each and every one of us, as citizens, just because they are trying to get answers on medical mistakes. We have had promise after promise to introduce medical disclosure legislation. The Patient Safety (Notifiable Patient Safety Incidents) Bill 2019 was eventually referred, 18 months ago, to Committee Stage with the Select Committee on Health. The Bill has, however, lain there since. This legislation would allow families to get to the truth of what happened to loved ones. It would allow those dealing with the consequences of a medical mistake or misdiagnosis to get redress. The State is continuing to fork out large sums of money for legal fees when we should be providing people with the truth. Where is this legislation and when will it be enacted?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. The purpose of the Patient Safety (Notifiable Patient Safety Incidents) Bill 2019 is to set out the legislative framework for a number of important patient safety measures, including mandatory open disclosure of specified serious patient safety incidents, including a process to designate other patient safety incidents by regulation in line with advancements in clinical practice, the notification of these serious

incidents externally to the Health Information and Quality Authority, and so forth. Work on drafting amendments was delayed in 2020 but it has now progressed and is currently being finalised in the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel. It is anticipated that this work will conclude in the coming weeks and that the Bill will be ready to come to Committee Stage early in the autumn session.

Deputy Sorca Clarke: Despite words, commitments and supposed agreements, maternity restrictions remain in place. These are real women and real-time experiences, and a real solution is needed. Yesterday, I spoke with a lady who is having her second baby under these restrictions. Extenuating circumstances apply because this will be the last baby the couple in question will have. In the period since the first child was born, this woman has gone through the unendurable pain of losing twins to miscarriage. Again, she was alone because of maternity restrictions. This couple are now pleading, in writing, to their local hospital to facilitate the father to be there for just this one birth. That is all he is asking for. It is clear the hospital is not listening. If the Taoiseach does not have the authority to fix this, who does?

The Taoiseach: The clinicians are responsible in the hospital. The guidelines have been issued nationally. This should not be happening and that family should be facilitated by the hospital. The vaccinations have worked in hospital settings. The incidence of the disease is very low in hospitals because of the positive impact of vaccinations. I do not know which hospital it is-----

Deputy Sorca Clarke: It is the Regional Hospital Mullingar.

The Taoiseach: If the Deputy sends the details to my office, I will follow through with the Health Service Executive with regard to what is happening at the hospital, what the policy is and exactly why the clinical guidance issued nationally is not being followed, if that is the case.

Deputy Willie O’Dea: As the Taoiseach is aware, it is policy on all sides of the House that people who are elderly or ill and need care should be allowed to live in and enjoy the comfort of their own homes, insofar as possible. Despite this, there are thousands of people in nursing homes in this country, funded under the fair deal scheme at huge cost to the taxpayer, who would prefer to be living at home with their families and whose families would prefer them to be at home. This is not possible because we do not have a proper statutory system of home care. There is a definite commitment in the programme for Government to introduce such a scheme. Has work commenced on the preparation of this extremely urgent legislation? When can we expect to see it?

In the last few seconds remaining to me, I will follow on from the question asked by the previous Deputy. I, too, have a particular problem with a maternity hospital in my constituency which is flagrantly disobeying the directive of the Minister for Health. I will be in touch with the Taoiseach about that.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for the issue he has raised. I know he is a long-time advocate for statutory home care. There is a commitment to do that and I will revert to the Deputy with an update on the progression of that legislation.

Through the Minister for Health, the HSE and its CEO, we have given very clear direction on what should happen in maternity hospitals around partners being allowed in for all the scans and for births. That also applies in respect of Limerick.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are three Deputies remaining, whose questions I will take if they are each prepared to put their questions in 30 seconds. We will then ask the Taoiseach to answer all three questions.

Deputy Michael Collins: The Irish fishing industry has stumbled from one crisis to another in the past 12 months, with penalty points, the terrible Brexit deal for the industry and, in recent weeks, the weighing crisis that the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority, SFPA, and Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine have known about since Christmas but did not inform the sector of until 16 April. Now we find out that the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and SFPA have made an agreement with French, British and Belgian vessels landing in Ireland that their fish can be landed into the back of lorries and the catch landed does not have to be sampled, weighed or checked. I ask the Taoiseach and Minister to direct the SFPA to revoke this underhand agreement and to ensure that any foreign fishing trawler landing fish in Ireland be subject to the same checks as Irish fishing vessels.

Deputy Patrick Costello: I have written to the Taoiseach and the Departments of Justice and Foreign Affairs about the independent commission on information retrieval, which is an integral part of the various agreements on Northern Ireland, including the Stormont House and New Decade, New Approach agreements. The agreement setting up the commission was signed in 2015 and was laid before the House in January 2016. It requires legislation here. Every reply I receive indicates that the commission will be established as the legislation is passed in Dublin and London. When will the legislation be passed in Dublin? What is blocking it? Why can we not just move ahead, even if the British do not?

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: My question is on children's respite services in Galway. Cran-nóg respite service caters for children with complex medical needs. It is only open for 19 nights each month and needs to be expanded to include more children. Cranmór respite centre for children with autism needs an alternative location. Currently, if children require emergency respite, the only option available for parents is to bring their child to an accident and emergency department, which is crazy. Will the Taoiseach commit to extending children's respite services in the Galway area?

The Taoiseach: I will meet representatives from the fishing industry next week on a broad range of significant issues that face the industry. I am not in a position to direct the SFPA because of legislation passed in this House which separates the executive function from the operational enforcement obligations on the SFPA.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: To respond to Deputy Costello, again the wider legacy issues of the Stormont House Agreement have to be dealt with in concert. We will work to see whether we can do it independently but there is a need for all parties to the agreement to move and follow through on it and we are committed to doing so. I will contact the HSE in respect of additional resources and what the situation is with regard to respite for children in both centres identified.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Taoiseach for taking those questions.

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Planning and Development (Climate Emergency Measures) (Amendment) Bill 2021: First Stage

Deputy Bríd Smith: I move:

That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to amend the Planning and Development Act 2000 in order to restrict certain developments in fossil fuels infrastructure and high energy usage data centres, to remove some developments from listing as strategic development infrastructure projects, to revise the procedure for making applications directly to An Bord Pleanála and to ensure that regard be given to the State's climate targets and commitments and to provide for related matters.

People may have seen the *Business Post* last week. It published research from the Marine Institute, which probably told a lot of us something quite obvious. This is that the target of reaching a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of 51% by 2030 cannot be met if we continue to facilitate the growth of data centres in this country. It showed that if we allow a corporate rush for data centres on the premise of an ever-expanding market, contrary to what the Minister, Deputy Ryan, has repeatedly said in the House, we cannot have our cake and eat it. We cannot have an unlimited boom in data centres and fulfil our obligations to try to limit global temperature rises.

In the world the Minister seems to believe in, we have to continue to welcome data centres and see more investment in offshore and onshore renewable energy to fuel these very same centres. Thus, we enter a magical roundabout where the land is festooned with data centres empowered by fields of windmills that litter our lands and banks of windmills off our shores and around our coast. I am really not sure whether the Green Party believes in this vision but it is a fantasy. It exposes a basic flaw in the policy of trying to deal with the climate crisis, which is an attempt to marry the insatiable demands of an economy based on the blind pursuit of profit, ever-expanding and increasing markets and an endless accumulation of wealth, with the need for a sustainable humane society in which the people and the planet are a priority. Data centres are not essential for the future of our economy or our society. They are not great investments and they are only essential as a component of an economy built and structured on the needs of the corporate sector.

There is no way we can reconcile the economy with the needs of addressing the climate crisis when more than 100 data centres are planned in the country, which will consume more than 70% of whatever renewable energy we produce. Therefore, we have a stark choice to make. We can and should be replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy but allowing data centres to gobble up this energy will leave us with a Herculean task to meet the reduction we need to make to stave off the worst of the climate catastrophe. Those who are most enthusiastic about placing carbon taxes on ordinary people to change individual behaviour seem to see it as a given that they do not ever attempt to change the behaviour of corporations or businesses or challenge them.

The Bill will address another gaping hole in the climate Bill the Minister, Deputy Ryan, is bringing before the House today, which is the issue of liquified natural gas, LNG, and fracked gas. Later today, we will be encouraged by the Minister and others to rejoice at the passing of the climate Bill, and although there are many provisions in it that we welcome, above all else we need to be honest with ourselves when it comes to addressing the climate crisis. We cannot fool nature. We can fool ourselves but we cannot fool nature or the atmosphere.

I welcome the ban on new licences for oil and gas exploration but this is tempered with the knowledge that vast swathes of our oceans remain under the control of oil and gas interests, with licenses good to go until 2034. We are told an energy security review is under way, which will ultimately decide the Government's policy on gas and LNG. In the meantime, the Minister states he disapproves of it as does the Government. On 3 June, we learned the Shannon LNG project had completed its preplanning consultation with An Bord Pleanála and remains a live project, notwithstanding the displeasure of the Minister. It is not good enough for the Minister or the Government to state they personally oppose LNG or fracked gas. We need them to legislate for this opposition. The Bill will do this and this is what we are stating must be done.

The Bill points to the fault lines in the future climate battle. Reliance on market mechanisms and hoped for future technology will not stop the climate crisis and will not deliver a just transition. The Bill points to the action the State needs to take. We need to legislate to stop the development of LNG. We need to legislate to stop the importation of fracked gas or the development of the data centres I mentioned. If we do not do so, we will hasten the destruction of our environment. The science is settled and we need to stop the expansion and stop pretending that gas is somehow a magical green transitional fuel.

I hope the Bill will get the support of the House and move to Committee Stage as soon as possible. I commend the climate movement, the students and the groups who protested and brought a mass movement onto the street. The Bill going forward today is totally inadequate. I know this will be the future battleground for the movement and I hope they will put their weight behind ending the expansion of data centres and stopping the importation of LNG and the development of LNG in Ireland.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the Bill opposed?

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Jack Chambers): No.

Question put and agreed to.

Deputy Bríd Smith: I move: "That the Bill be taken in Private Members' time."

Question put and agreed to.

Estimates for Public Services 2021

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): I move the following Revised Estimates for Public Services 2021:

Vote 1 — President's Establishment (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €4,511,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Secretary General to the President, for certain other expenses of the President's Establishment and for certain grants.

Vote 2 — Department of the Taoiseach (Revised Estimate)

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That a sum not exceeding €50,177,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Department of the Taoiseach, including certain services administered by the Department and for payment of grants.

Vote 3 — Office of the Attorney General (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €16,754,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Attorney General, including a grant.

Vote 4 — Central Statistics Office (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €63,155,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Central Statistics Office.

Vote 5 — Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €44,704,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Vote 6 — Office of the Chief State Solicitor (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €37,685,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Chief State Solicitor.

Vote 7 — Office of the Minister for Finance (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €39,511,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Finance, including the Paymaster-General's Office, for certain services administered by the Office of the Minister and for payment of certain grants.

Vote 8 — Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €9,623,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Vote 9 — Office of the Revenue Commissioners (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €441,727,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, including certain other services administered by that Office.

Vote 10 — Tax Appeals Commission (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €3,218,000 be granted to defray the charge which will

come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Tax Appeals Commission.

Vote 11 — Public Expenditure and Reform (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €42,674,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, for certain services administered by the Office of the Minister and for payment of certain grants.

Vote 12 — Superannuation and Retired Allowances (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €339,868,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for pensions, superannuation, occupational injuries, and additional and other allowances and gratuities under the Superannuation Acts 1834 to 2004 and sundry other statutes; extrastatutory pensions, allowances and gratuities awarded by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, fees to medical referees and occasional fees to doctors; compensation and other payments in respect of personal injuries; fees to Pensions Authority and other professional fees, miscellaneous payments, etc.

Vote 13 — Office of Public Works (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €501,775,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of Public Works; for services administered by that Office and for payment of certain grants and for the recoupment of certain expenditure and that a sum not exceeding €20,000,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 14 — State Laboratory (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €10,513,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the State Laboratory.

Vote 15 — Secret Service (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €2,000,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for Secret Service.

Vote 16 — Valuation Office (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €16,296,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Valuation Office and certain minor services.

Vote 17 — Public Appointments Service (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €16,636,000 be granted to defray the charge which will

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come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Public Appointments Service and that a sum not exceeding €200,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 18 — National Shared Services Office (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €55,587,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the National Shared Services Office and that a sum not exceeding €1,435,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 19 — Office of the Ombudsman (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €12,139,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Ombudsman, the Office of the Commission for Public Service Appointments, the Standards in Public Office Commission, the Office of the Information Commissioner and the Office of the Commissioner for Environmental Information.

Vote 20 — Garda Síochána (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €1,856,175,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Garda Síochána, including pensions, etc.; for the payment of certain witnesses' expenses, and for payment of certain grants and that a sum not exceeding €12,750,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 21 — Prisons (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €385,384,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Prison Service, and other expenses in connection with prisons, including places of detention, and for payment of certain grants and that a sum not exceeding €5,468,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 22 — Courts Service (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €123,882,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for such of the salaries and expenses of the Courts Service and of the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeal, the High Court, the Special Criminal Court, the Circuit Court and the District Court and of certain other minor services as are not charged to the Central Fund

and that a sum not exceeding €4,895,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 23 — Property Registration Authority (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €32,481,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Property Registration Authority.

Vote 24 — Justice (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €399,509,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Justice, Probation Service staff and of certain other services including payments under cash-limited schemes administered by that Office, and payment of certain grants and that a sum not exceeding €3,900,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 25 — Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €6,933,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and for payment of certain grants.

Vote 26 — Education (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €8,643,710,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Education, for certain services administered by that Office, and for the payments of certain grants.

Vote 27 — International Co-operation (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €569,984,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for certain Official Development Assistance, including certain grants, and for contributions to certain International Organisations involved in Development Assistance and for salaries and expenses in connection therewith.

Vote 28 — Foreign Affairs (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €236,760,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and for certain services administered by that Office, including grants and contributions to International Organisations.

Vote 29 — Environment, Climate and Communications (Revised Estimate)

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That a sum not exceeding €719,976,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications, including certain services administered by that Office, and for payment of certain grants and that a sum not exceeding €37,747,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 30 — Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €1,462,329,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, including certain services administered by that Office, and for payment of certain grants and subsidies and for the payment of certain grants under cash-limited schemes and the remediation of Haulbowline Island and that a sum not exceeding €31,600,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 31 — Transport (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €3,535,851,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Transport, including certain services administered by that Office, for payment of certain grants and certain other services and that a sum not exceeding €151,480,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 34 — Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €5,056,505,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, including grants to Local Authorities, grants and other expenses in connection with housing, water services, miscellaneous schemes, subsidies and grants and that a sum not exceeding €214,000,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 35 — Army Pensions (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €257,650,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for retired pay, pensions, compensation, allowances and gratuities payable under sundry statutes to or in respect of members of the Defence Forces and certain other Military Organisations, etc., and for sundry contributions and expenses in connection therewith; for certain extra-statutory children's allowances and other payments and for sundry grants.

Vote 36 — Defence (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €785,461,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Defence, including certain services administered by that Office; for the pay and expenses of the Defence Forces; and for payment of certain grants.

Vote 37 — Social Protection (Further Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €17,389,967,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Social Protection, for certain services administered by that Office, for payments to the Social Insurance Fund and for certain grants and that a sum not exceeding €910,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 38 — Health (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €21,696,964,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Health and certain other services administered by that Office, including grants to the Health Service Executive and miscellaneous grants and that a sum not exceeding €107,000,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 39 — Office of Government Procurement (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €18,500,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of Government Procurement and that a sum not exceeding €59,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 40 – Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €1,879,461,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, for certain services administered by that Office and for the payment of grants and that a sum not exceeding €4,100,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.

Vote 41 — Policing Authority (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €3,750,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Policing Authority.

Vote 43 — Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (Revised Estimate)

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That a sum not exceeding €22,799,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer.

Vote 44 — Data Protection Commission (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €18,898,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Data Protection Commission.

Vote 45 — Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Revised Estimate)

That a sum not exceeding €2,681,500,000 be granted to defray the charge which will come in course of payment during the year ending on the 31st day of December, 2021, for the salaries and expenses of the Office of the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science for certain services administered by that Office, and for the payments of certain grants and that a sum not exceeding €16,700,000 be granted by way of the application for capital supply services of unspent appropriations, the surrender of which may be deferred under Section 91 of the Finance Act 2004.”

Votes put and agreed to.

Estimates for Public Service 2021: Motion

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Michael McGrath): I move:

That, notwithstanding Standing Order 215 of the Standing Orders of Dáil Éireann relative to Public Business or the Resolution of the Dáil of 16th December, 2020, the following Further Revised Estimate for the Public Services for the year ending 31st December, 2021, be presented to the Dáil and circulated to members on 16th June, 2021, being a date later than that prescribed for the presentation of Estimates and be referred to the Select Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment, pursuant to Standing Orders 95(1)(a) and 215(3):

Vote 32 — Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Further Revised Estimate).

Question put and agreed to.

Dublin Bay South By-election: Issue of Writ

Deputy Brendan Griffin: I move:

That the Ceann Comhairle direct the Clerk of the Dáil to issue his writ for the election of a member to fill the vacancy which has occurred in the membership of the present Dáil consequent on the resignation of Deputy Eoghan Murphy, a Member for the constituency of Dublin Bay South.

Question put and agreed to.

Planning and Development (Climate Measures) (Amendment) Bill 2019: Leave to Withdraw [Private Members]

Deputy Bríd Smith: I move:

That leave be granted to withdraw the Planning and Development (Climate Measures) (Amendment) Bill 2019.

Question put and agreed to

Ceisteanna - Questions

Cabinet Committees

1. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet committee on Covid-19 last met; and when it will next meet. [27893/21]

2. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet committee on Covid-19 last met; and when the next meeting is planned. [29524/21]

3. **Deputy Cian O’Callaghan** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet committee on Covid-19 will next meet. [30926/21]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 1 to 3, inclusive, together.

The Cabinet committee on Covid-19 was re-established by Government on 29 June 2020 to continue to assess the social and economic impacts of the potential spread of Covid-19 and oversee the cross-government response. The committee met most recently on Thursday, 27 May. The date of the next meeting has not been set.

Our overall approach to the management of the pandemic continues to be one that is cautious and sustainable over the immediate, medium and longer term. Any easing of measures has been gradual with sufficient time between phases to assess impact and to respond if the epidemiological situation was to deteriorate.

We are mindful of the risks as we move forward. We have to monitor closely the issue of dangerous new variants, especially the Delta variant and the impact it has on the spread of the virus. In light of this, yesterday the Government agreed to enhanced quarantine arrangements for passengers not fully vaccinated arriving from Great Britain.

In making recent decisions on next steps, the Government weighed a number of considerations, including the progress achieved in managing the spread of the disease, the impact of

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the vaccination programme and the need to continue responsibly reopening our society and economy. When we open a sector of our society or economy, we want it to stay open. Our plan is working and we are now in the early stages of the recovery phase of the pandemic.

In late May, the Government decided to move ahead with the next stage of reopening the economy and society in line with our national strategy, Resilience and Recovery: The Path Ahead. The decision was based on public health advice that a cautious and phased reopening can continue, with a continuing emphasis on outdoor activity, and sufficient time between phases to assess the impact and ensure that progress in controlling the virus is maintained. The advice at the time was that the measures were of low to medium risk.

The most recent announcement included the lifting of a number of public health restrictions during June as well as setting out plans for further easing of measures over the summer, subject to prevailing public health advice. In early June, accommodation services, such as hotels and bed and breakfast accommodation, reopened to the general public. Last week, cinemas and theatres reopened and outdoor services resumed in restaurants and bars.

Increased numbers are now permitted at outdoor organised events, one unvaccinated household can visit one other unvaccinated household, sports matches can be held and gyms, pools and leisure centres can reopen for individual exercise. Selected sport and cultural pilot live events are taking place in June to assess protective measures and test the logistical arrangements for further reopening. Subject to the prevailing disease situation, July will see a return to indoor dining, the resumption of certain indoor activities and increased numbers permitted to attend events.

From 19 July, subject to the prevailing public health situation, Ireland will operate the EU digital Covid certificate for travel originating within the European Union-EEA area. Subject to continued progress, further easing of restrictions will be considered for August, including an increase in the numbers permitted to gather and attend events, both outdoor and indoor.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I will raise three issues. First, in relation to the Delta variant, I welcome what Mr. Paul Reid communicated in the HSE update yesterday. With regard to the AstraZeneca vaccine, an issue I have been raising for weeks, ongoing communication is needed and the commitment needs to be honoured by 19 July. Have studies been commissioned or has the Government received a briefing on the efficacy of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine against the Delta variant? That is an honest question. Does the Taoiseach have any information on this matter because I have not seen any and I follow it intensely? A Public Health England study, which only looked at AstraZeneca, found that the first dose is only 33% effective against the Delta variant. Another study this week showed that Pfizer and AstraZeneca are highly effective after two doses but there do not appear to be any studies on the Janssen vaccine from Johnson & Johnson. Will the Taoiseach ask the national immunisation advisory committee, NIAC, and National Public Health Emergency Team, NPHET, to look at this?

Second, the Irish Wheelchair Association has raised issues with regard to accessibility in cities and towns. There are good developments as regards outdoor dining and facilitating people but providing toilet facilities and access is a real issue.

Finally, I ask the Taoiseach to consider the provision of grants for community halls that have been closed due to Covid. While some groups have been funded - the Nenagh Musical Academy, for instance, received good funding for an outdoor performance - the halls in which

many are based have no income. Once-off small grants to local authorities to allow them to keep these community halls with tenants going for the next six months would be appreciated. They are doing their best but their fixed costs are not being covered.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I also raise an issue in relation to the AstraZeneca vaccine. We cannot deny that there is a high level of concern among people in their 60s and those with underlying health conditions who have received their first dose of AstraZeneca. The first concern relates to the length of the interval between doses but a second concern relates to the efficacy of the vaccine in respect of the Delta variant.

Things have changed since we got more information about the Delta variant. We know now that, even with two doses, AstraZeneca only gives protection of up to 60% with respect to transmissibility. While another study has been done on the risk of hospitalisation, in relation to transmissibility, AstraZeneca only gives protection of 60% compared with the 88% protection Pfizer gives. When I asked the Minister a few weeks ago if he would consider mixing and matching, his response was that he could not do that because all of the existing vaccines had been committed. There was, therefore, a logistical reason for that. Since then, NIAC has stated it has not yet finished studying the mixing of vaccine doses but that the early indications are very encouraging. Professor Luke O'Neill has strongly supported this approach. Professor Kingston Mills made a very strong epidemiological case yesterday for why we should take that approach. Five other European countries are doing it. Will the Taoiseach give consideration to this now, especially in light of Paul Reid's statement this morning that supply lines have improved?

We need to protect people on the basis of risk. The older a person is, the more likely he or she is to have underlying health conditions and the more likely he or she is to be at risk of contracting the virus. Will the Taoiseach give consideration to this matter?

Deputy Paul Murphy: The Taoiseach has taken a number of big gambles in the management of the Covid pandemic. The biggest was the decision to reopen at the end of November last year. To put it mildly, those gambles did not pay off. The Taoiseach is taking another big gamble now in relation to the Delta variant. We hope that gamble pays off and we are able to achieve sufficient levels of full vaccination, in particular of vulnerable groups, before the Delta variant becomes dominant here. If, however, the gamble not to introduce mandatory hotel quarantine for those coming from England, Scotland and Wales does not pay off, we will be in a crisis and there will be negative consequences for people's health and long Covid and there will be extra unnecessary deaths. We will also be in a position where not only will the reopening of indoor dining and pubs scheduled for the start of July have to be delayed but other measures may have to be reversed. Obviously, nobody wants to be in that situation but if we are, will the Taoiseach take responsibility for the decision he has made and will he own up to it at that point? It will be difficult to convince people that we need another lockdown to stop the Delta variant but that is, unfortunately, the position we might be in four, five or six weeks from now if the Delta variant becomes dominant. The reason for that will be that we did not do what we could have done at this point to try to slow its spread.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I return to the maternity hospital restrictions on partners, which are still in place in many hospitals despite the fact that the Taoiseach, Chief Medical Officer and Minister for Health have all stated they should be lifted and the HSE has issued a circular on the matter. The Taoiseach will have heard Deputies today speak about experiences in Mullingar and Limerick. Let me add another. A colleague of mine drove his wife, who is 36

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weeks' pregnant, to the Coombe. She was sick with pains, vomiting, headaches, dehydration and very distressed. He was not allowed to be with her. These experiences are happening right across the State. I raised this with the Taoiseach previously. Last month, he told me he would talk to the CEO of the HSE to ensure the HSE circular was being applied. It is not being applied at countless locations. Will the Taoiseach now engage directly with the CEO of each hospital group to ensure every maternity hospital and unit lifts these restrictions now? A hands-off or an arm's-length approach to this matter has not worked.

The Taoiseach: On Deputy Kelly's questions, I will check in relation to Janssen. I have not seen research either in respect of the Janssen vaccine and its efficacy in protecting against the Delta variant. Unfortunately, the situation with Janssen supply has been very difficult in terms of the vaccines being in a plant in America and not being freed up. That has significantly impacted on supplies to this country in respect of Janssen, as the House will be aware.

In respect of the Irish Wheelchair Association, Deputy Kelly is correct and I will certainly follow up on the matter. Particularly from a local authority perspective, there should be proactive provision in terms of access to outdoor facilities, dining facilities and so forth.

With regard to community halls, there is an enhanced community grant scheme. We provided €5 million recently to augment €2 million that had been provided already to support and enhance community-based facilities during Covid-19. That is available and we will see what can be done.

Deputy Alan Kelly: The criteria are tight.

The Taoiseach: I will see what I can do to relax the criteria. We did not ask that they be that tight. We want to support community facilities because communities have been very good during Covid-19. They have been very effective in helping the State's efforts and society's efforts to deal with Covid-19. When we allocated the funding, we did not want the criteria to be too tight. Obviously, the funding has to meet the needs of communities and meet clearly defined objectives. I will follow up on that matter.

Regarding Deputy Shortall's comments, according to a public health study yesterday, AstraZeneca is 92% effective against hospitalisation. That is a key metric and an important point.

Deputy Róisín Shortall: Not against transmissibility.

The Taoiseach: I know, but a 92% effectiveness against hospitalisation is an important point. It was an important piece of research that deserves to be highlighted. That is the point I am making. Also, NIAC has not recommended the mixing of vaccines. By the middle of July, we will be down to only two vaccines - Moderna and Pfizer. That is where we will be once we have completed the second dosage of AstraZeneca. NIAC's Professor Karina Butler yesterday was very clear that people should accept the vaccines that they are offered. We will be in a position to complete the second dosage of the AstraZeneca programme by the middle of July. For the remainder of the programme, we need to get as many people as protected as we possibly can. That is important, too. In terms of the supply of vaccines, June will be the month with the highest supply that we will have. It is important to get as large a number as we possibly can vaccinated. As a country, we are at the top in Europe in terms of participation rates across the age cohorts, which is an important and significant point. This is giving us added protection as a society.

We can all comment and we can all have individual perspectives, but we have to go through the processes and various channels as the advices come through. What the Deputy is advocating is a very significant step. Equally, every time we chop and change, it can potentially affect uptake. That is a problem. We want to maintain our very high performance in relation to participation rates and the uptake of vaccines. The age cohort approach has worked. We go down through the age cohorts and people wait to get their vaccines and then avail of them. That is where we are right now.

The HSE has announced that it can bring forward the AstraZeneca programme - that is good news - and that, by mid-July, everyone will have his or her second dose. That will give very strong protection. I am one of those who have taken the AstraZeneca vaccine and I am quite prepared to wait my turn for the second dose.

As a society, if we keep pushing this out, we can get to very good levels of overall societal protection by the end of July, which will then hopefully be a strong bulwark against variants. I think we will need boosters later on in the year or early next year. It will depend. I think our older age cohorts will need booster vaccines, but NIAC has said that the length of time that immunity lasts is longer. That is good news as well. We will then have to look at young people and children in the autumn. NIAC is examining that following authorisations that have been given to the companies in respect of children and young people. Along with the European Union, we have entered into pre-purchase agreements for mRNA vaccines throughout 2021 and 2022.

Regarding Deputy Paul Murphy, I do not take gambles on this. He should not personalise it to the degree that he seems intent on doing. We took advice to move to level 3 in November, we moved to level 3 and there was no modelling in terms of the scale of the third wave or the Alpha variant, B.1.1.7. We are not taking gambles in relation to the Delta variant. We have taken on board the public health advice in respect of the reopening of society. We were advised at the most recent meeting that there was low to medium risk in terms of the opening up of internal hospitality in early July and travel on 19 July. We will keep this under review. So far, the last seven days have been better than the previous seven days, but we are still keeping this under review. We are not taking anything for granted. We are conscious of the risks.

An Ceann Comhairle: Taoiseach, we need to move on. I am afraid we are out of time. We need to go to Question No. 4.

The Taoiseach: On the maternity issue, I have spoken to the chief executive officer of the HSE. The HSE runs its organisation and the CEO and his management team deal and work with the hospitals across the country in terms of the clinical guidance that has issued from the HSE. That is the proper way for it to happen. I will engage again with the HSE in respect of comments that have been made in the House today.

Cabinet Committees

4. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet committee on health last met; and when it will next meet. [27894/21]

5. **Deputy Cathal Crowe** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet committee on health last met; and when the next meeting is planned. [29522/21]

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6. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet committee on health last met; and when it will next meet. [31399/21]

7. **Deputy Paul Murphy** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet committee on health last met; and when it will next meet. [31402/21]

8. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach when the Cabinet committee on health will next meet. [31800/21]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 4 to 8, inclusive, together.

The Cabinet committee on health oversees implementation of programme for Government commitments in relation to health, receives detailed reports on identified policy areas and considers the implementation of health reforms, including Sláintecare. The Cabinet committee last met on Monday, 14 December. Since then, there have been eight meetings of the Cabinet committee on Covid-19. It is expected to meet again shortly. In addition to the meetings of the full Cabinet and of Cabinet committees, I meet with Ministers on an individual basis to focus on different issues. I meet regularly with the Minister for Health to discuss priorities in the area of health and, in particular, our management and response to Covid-19.

The pandemic has led to an unprecedented interruption to normal healthcare activity in both acute and community settings. This interruption has been severely exacerbated by the recent cyberattack on the HSE's IT systems. Healthcare services continue to be severely impacted. Essential services are continuing. However, systems are not operating as normal and patients are experiencing delays in some cases. Existing arrangements with private hospitals are being utilised to assist with urgent care requirements. The main focus of the HSE has been to get priority systems back online, such as radiology and diagnostic systems, maternity and infant care, patient administration systems, chemotherapy and radiation oncology. Most hospitals are still dealing with substantial challenges and limited functionality.

Work is ongoing to restore other hospital systems progressively. It is likely that it will be at least several more weeks before the system is operating normally.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I am blue in the face raising the issue of maternity restrictions here. I have raised some very personal stories of friends and neighbours of mine. The situation is still ongoing. Pictures emerged at the weekend of partners queuing outside the Rotunda Hospital waiting to get in. It was crazy and barbaric. Partners are not able to attend scans or help their partners through all stages of labour or induction, or even after the birth. Of those hospitals that are open, many have strict visiting hours.

A new dimension has arisen. In Clonmel in my county, an expectant mother was told by the hospital that she had to attend a foetal anomaly scan alone due to the cyberattack. How can that happen? How can a hospital issue a letter like that? Is this being used in any other way? It is absolutely outrageous, given the additional circumstances. The Better Maternity Care campaign has pointed out the anomalies across all the hospitals despite the Government's advice. Who is in charge?

We are running into a serious crisis in the provision of home help. There are not enough people working in home help. Unless the Government finally acknowledges the conditions under which these well-qualified people work, there is a registered employment agreement and they are paid enough, we will face a serious crisis. In my political career, I have never seen

such a lack of home help provision even where people are given their hours. I have never seen so many queries about this matter.

Deputy Paul Murphy: The Taoiseach stated that he had not taken gambles in terms of Covid. That is not historically accurate. I hope that we will have a public inquiry into the management of Covid and it will be for that inquiry to judge, but the Taoiseach also said something that is for us to discuss today, that no gamble is being taken at the moment. There is a gamble or, to use a different word, a choice involved. The Taoiseach clearly accepts that there is a problem with the threat of the Delta variant becoming dominant here, that our quarantine regime, for those coming from England, Scotland and Wales, has been inadequate and that the Government is, therefore, changing the nature of that regime. The problem I see is how the nature of the regime is being changed. What is being altered is the length of quarantine, from five days to ten, at home. It seems that there is strong evidence to suggest that the main problem is not with the length of time but with the fact that it is at-home quarantine. What percentage of those who are supposed to be quarantining at home have got PCR tests after five days? That would be an interesting statistic to know. The main point is that there are flaws in the at-home quarantine model. There are many people who do not have a home in which they can self-isolate and quarantine safely. This is because they share a home and so on. Many others cannot do it without the kind of supports that come with a proper mandatory hotel quarantine regime. The Government is making a choice. It is taking a gamble by not opting for mandatory hotel quarantine, which would surely be more effective at slowing down the spread of the Delta variant.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I want to raise the issue of the escalating crisis in public dental health services. As the Taoiseach is aware, before the pandemic struck, waiting lists had been unacceptably high for many years and the shortfall in the context of the HSE hiring adequate numbers of staff for Covid testing made a bad situation worse throughout last year. In my constituency, Dublin Central, dentists in the public system have become increasingly frustrated as staff continue to be redeployed for vaccination duties. There are more than 10,000 schoolchildren in Dublin and north Dublin who rely on HSE-provided dental care. That figure does not include children who require specialist treatment. The families concerned do not have the option of private care when the public system lets them down.

Last week, the Irish Dental Association informed its members that the HSE dental services in Kildare and west Wicklow have been forced to confine the provision of dental care to emergency care only for children and adults. This decision has nothing to do with the recent cyberattack, it is about the historic under-resourcing of dental care in the public system. The association's fear is that HSE dental services throughout the State will be forced to impose similar restrictions, sooner rather than later. Is the Taoiseach aware of the depth of this crisis and what action will he take to ensure that regulations, introduced by him more than 20 years ago to ensure and guarantee treatment, are finally implemented and resourced in full?

Deputy Róisín Shortall: I have two points to make. The first relates to the changes to home quarantining. Those changes will be meaningless unless there is some element of supervision. At a minimum, what should be done is a linking up of the passenger locator form with the PCR test result, because we simply do not know what is happening, whether people are getting tested or what test results are.

My second point is about the Irish Cancer Society, which is warning very clearly that we are facing a tsunami of undiagnosed and, in some instances, advanced cancer cases. The Irish Cancer Society is looking for a number of things to be done. It wants leadership on the cancer

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strategy, which must be updated. We require more consultants working in this area and more theatre time and beds. The society says that, at the very minimum, there should be a public awareness campaign because it is conscious of the fact that people have, in the main, been reticent about seeing their GPs during Covid. People have been nervous about doing so. GPs are reporting that patients are not coming to see them with concerns about lumps, pains or cancer concerns. The Irish Cancer Society is asking that a clear public awareness campaign be put into operation to advise people that if they have particular concerns, they should go to their GP as soon as possible. Does the Taoiseach support this?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputies for raising these issues. On the points raised by Deputy Kelly, there is no reason partners and family members cannot attend scans and appointments relating to maternity services.

Deputy Alan Kelly: Unfortunately, it happens.

The Taoiseach: It should not be happening. Clear guidance has been given by the HSE to hospitals. That is clinical guidance. The question is often asked as to who is in charge. In health and in the world of medicine, politicians do not dictate - and have never done so - to medics in terms of clinical guidance. Given that we have had such a successful vaccination programme in hospitals and in view of the fact that the levels of disease are so low, risks are very low. It is difficult to comprehend why these restrictions are remaining in place, particularly in light of the national guidance given by the HSE. I will certainly have the issue of the woman being told to attend for a fatal foetal anomaly scan alone to which Deputy Kelly referred investigated. The cyberattack has put services under significant pressure, there is no question about that. However, that is more in terms of the front line. For those working on the front line, it has been very difficult and traumatic and for those rebuilding the system it has been extraordinarily difficult and challenging.

(Interruptions).

The Taoiseach: I am making the point generally. I am not saying it happened in this context. I am making the point generally, which we must acknowledge. We can criticise the health service a lot, but the work it has done in the context of Covid and in the aftermath of the cyber-attack has been truly heroic. I must say that. It has stood up to the test and we must say that a bit more because we are always reluctant to affirm the health services because, very often, there is not much to be gained politically by the Opposition generally - I am not referring to Deputy Kelly in this respect - supporting or affirming the good work done.

As regards maternity hospitals, Deputy Kelly will know - and we all know - about the autonomy of hospitals, the autonomy of masters and the heads of maternity services having jurisdiction within the maternity hospitals and units. I do not know whether that was a factor here, but it needs to be sorted out because it has been raised in the House consistently. It is not just a political direction, but the clinical direction has been given and there needs to be uniformity and consistency of policy to benefit mothers-to-be and their partners.

On the issue of home care packages, unprecedented resources have been allocated. It is unprecedented in that there are 5 million home care hours.

Deputy Alan Kelly: There are not enough people.

The Taoiseach: Those resources, coming into the winter period, were very effective and

had much impact.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I agree.

The Taoiseach: As to the upskilling and recruitment of people, we will continue to work on that.

Deputy Paul Murphy stated that it is only a question of whether we use the word “gamble” or the word “choice”. There is a fundamental difference between taking a gamble and making a choice. I say emphatically that I do not gamble with peoples’ lives. I do not gamble with peoples’ health. I want to make that point and refute any implication or innuendo to the contrary.

The mandatory hotel quarantining that we introduced has worked in protecting public health. I think the positivity figure is 2.7% for those who have come through mandatory hotel quarantine. There is also a balance to be struck. There are choices and balances to be made. The vast majority of Deputies have been criticising the Government in the past two or three weeks because of the impact on aviation and the impact Covid has had on travel. Opposition Deputies have asserted that there is a Government policy on the situation of aviation. People cannot have it both ways. There is a balance to be struck also in making sure we have some semblance of an aviation sector when Covid is over and we emerge from it. I want to put that out there. It is something we must consider. We have funded and provided relief resources to airlines and airports. Notwithstanding that, the pandemic is having an impact throughout Europe and here as well. As a small open society, we depend a great deal on international connectivity. That said, we have acted in accordance with the advice so far. The advice we have received as to the decisions we have taken for June and July is that those measures are low to medium risk. That is the advice we have received.

As to the figures so far, we have been improving consistently since May in managing the impact and spread of the virus. That said, we are very mindful of the dangers of the Delta variant and will not be slow to act.

European Council

9. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his attendance at the European Council. [29775/21]

10. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on his attendance at the recent European Council meeting. [31801/21]

11. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the most recent European Council meeting. [31403/21]

12. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Taoiseach if he will report on the most recent European Council meeting. [31405/21]

The Taoiseach: I propose to take Questions Nos. 9 to 12, inclusive, together.

I joined European Union leaders in Brussels on 24 and 25 May for a special meeting of the European Council. We discussed Covid-19, including ongoing developments on vaccination across Europe, and the roll-out of the EU digital Covid certificate this summer. We reaffirmed

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our commitment to accelerating vaccine sharing with the aim of donating at least 100 million doses by the end of the year.

As agreed in December, we provided guidance to the European Commission on climate issues ahead of the expected publication of the Fit for 55 package in July.

We agreed that additional sanctions should be imposed on Belarus in response to the forced landing of a Ryanair flight in Minsk on 23 May, and the detention by Belarusian authorities of journalist Roman Protasevich and Sofia Sapega. We held a strategic debate on Russia and restated our commitment to the five principles that have guided the European Union's policy towards Russia since 2016. We will have a further discussion of EU-Russia relations at our meeting on 24 and 25 June.

We discussed relations with the United Kingdom and reaffirmed that the trade and co-operation agreement, together with the withdrawal agreement and its protocols, provide the framework for European Union-United Kingdom relations and should be fully and effectively implemented. I expressed my support for the approach being taken by the Commission, which continues to engage in good faith with the United Kingdom, working towards the full and effective implementation of what was agreed. I stress that I am absolutely clear on the bona fides of the Commission and its desire to bring these issues to an effective and pragmatic resolution. That requires political will on all sides. The Commission is there, as is the Government of the United Kingdom, and we have made the point that a deal can be reached on outstanding issues.

The Council welcomed the Israel-Palestine ceasefire, reiterated our commitment to the two-state solution and agreed to continue to work with international partners to restart the political process.

We also condemned the kidnapping of the transitional President of Mali and the Prime Minister and called for their immediate release.

Deputy Alan Kelly: It was a significant meeting of the European Council in May. A strong statement was made on the diversion of the Ryanair flight to Minsk and the sanctions against Belarus. Those sanctions need to be very strong because what happened was unprecedented. I ask the Taoiseach to update us with any other information he has on that matter.

Are we still on track to have the digital green certificate in place by 19 July? Hopefully all our 60 to 70-year-olds will be vaccinated by then. It is so important given all the discussions on the aviation industry. Are we still on track? We also need to know how far along the EU is in co-ordinating such a certificate with the likes of the US. Can the Taoiseach provide us with any information on that? How advanced are those plans? We need to look at our strong connections with the US. Such a digital certificate being interoperable is critically important. As we were very reliant on foreign direct investment, FDI, over the past year and a half, being able to travel between the EU and the US under a certificate that is completely interoperable would be a big plus. I ask the Taoiseach to provide us with some information on the status of those plans.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I thank the Taoiseach for that report. Beyond generalised assertions around restarting the political process, the two-state solution and so on, what is the European game plan as regards Palestine? In the face of the fact that Israel has been flagrantly in breach of international law time out of number, in the face of the bombardment of Gaza, the constant violations of human rights and the fact that Israel is an apartheid regime, what is the plan from Europe, bar occasional statements about a process that ran out of steam many moons

ago? This situation is dire and desperately needs planned, cohesive and consistent action.

I ask the Taoiseach to give us his reflections on the comments of David Frost at a Westminster committee this morning, in which he made clear that British unilateral action in respect of grace periods and the protocol is still very much on the table. That is very worrying. President Biden's intervention was extremely helpful and we had all hoped that it would clarify matters and concentrate the British mind. What is the Taoiseach's response to what David Frost had to say? I also ask him to address substantively the issue of Palestine. What is the plan for peace and for Palestinian self-determination?

Deputy Bríd Smith: I note that the EU discussions on the various foreign policy issues included a discussion about sanctions on Belarus. It is inevitable that the EU would discuss that but it is extraordinary that there has been no discussion at that level about possible sanctions on Israel. The fragile truce is now broken and, as we speak, Israeli aircraft are bombing Gaza yet again. Those 11 days of vicious attacks on the Gaza Strip led to over 260 deaths. We do not know where this is going to lead. For EU leaders to just say they welcome the truce and expect it to last is naive in the extreme. This is an ongoing situation of a racist apartheid state with ultranationalist Zionist troops of hate marauding through Arab areas, kicking in doors and screaming "Death to all Arabs". This situation is not normal. The Israeli state is not normal. Yet, the European Union has economic ties with it, through the EU-Israeli deal, that are worth billions to that state every year. There has been no discussion about imposing strong sanctions against Israel if such attacks resume. The EU will discuss Russia, Belarus and the whole nine yards but ignores the possibility of doing anything about the Israeli state. It is treating it as if it as a normal state when it is not. It is clearly an apartheid, racist, vicious state and that has to be dealt with by the European Union. What is the Taoiseach doing to put pressure on our European partners to have that discussion about sanctions on the Israeli state? I have no doubt that in the next few weeks we will have to put pressure on the Taoiseach again about the potential expulsion of the Israeli ambassador from this country, should this situation escalate.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I raise a particular case of human rights abuses in Saudi Arabia and ask that the Taoiseach raise it at the European Council. Yesterday, the Saudi authorities executed a young man called Mustafa Hashim al-Darwish. He was arrested as a minor in 2015 as a result of participation in protests. He was held in solitary confinement and brutally tortured and in those conditions he confessed to various crimes. When he was brought before the court he recanted his confession because it was a result of that torture. Nonetheless, he was executed yesterday. Not only is that a horrific abuse of human rights, it is also a clear breach of the commitments the Saudi authorities have previously made that they do not apply the death penalty to children. This is another example of them doing precisely that. I am completely opposed to the death penalty full stop, but the death penalty applied to those who were children at the time of their alleged offences - and this is a case of participating in a protest - is particularly abhorrent.

The Saudi regime receives substantial support from the United States Administration in the form of funding and arms. However, Saudi Arabia also buys weapons from European Union countries. The question then is whether the EU will make a strong statement about this particular case and about the use of the death penalty in Saudi Arabia.

The Taoiseach: Deputy Kelly raised issues in respect of Belarus. There was great anger at the meeting of the European Council regarding the hijacking of the Ryanair aeroplane and the subsequent treatment of Roman Protasevich and his partner. There was a sense at that meet-

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ing that a line had been crossed by the Lukashenko regime and that it was unacceptable. A move was made immediately to initiate strong sanctions against Belarus for its behaviour. In many ways, against the backdrop of President Biden's visit to Europe in the past week or two, this really sets the context for what is essentially now a struggle in the modern world between democracies and authoritarian regimes. More and more, that is where this is heading, when activities of this kind are now almost casually entertained by dictators such as Lukashenko. I condemn what his regime has done. I did not hear any condemnation regarding it in respect of the questions that I have been asked by others, but it was unacceptable behaviour.

Deputy Paul Murphy: We condemned it in the debate about Belarus last week.

The Taoiseach: Regarding the Covid-19 certificate, the Deputy's point concerning interoperability with the United States is a good one. We are on target. It is challenging. The Covid-19 certificate is fine and we have PCR tests from different providers etc.. Work is progressing to meet the 19 July target. The idea of Europe and the United States having an interoperable certificate is very important and it is something we are advancing. We are doing that with third countries more generally as well, where vaccination programmes have advanced significantly. It makes a great deal of sense and that is what we are pursuing.

Turning to Deputy McDonald's points, and starting with the issue of Palestine, Europe has consistently had a clear position on the Middle East peace process for many years. There is support now, including from Ireland, for a reinvigorated role for the Middle East Quartet, namely, the European Union, the United States, Russia and the United Nations, in working to restart the peace process and a political process to try to bring this situation to a sustainable outcome. That is what is required. Humanitarian assistance from the European Union has been very strong in respect of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, UNRWA, in particular, and in supporting Palestinians on the ground in the West Bank and in Gaza. It is not often acknowledged in this House, but it is very substantial. Such support will continue. Ireland has engaged at the United Nations Security Council regarding this conflict and that engagement has included strongly underlining the Security Council's responsibility to speak out. We will again continue to keep doing that.

Deputy McDonald also raised other issues. I did not hear those comments this morning from David Frost-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Kathleen Funchion): I am sorry, but we are out of time for this section of business.

The Taoiseach: I just want to make the point, if I may, that unilateral behaviour in respect of international agreements is not acceptable and it is not the course of travel for any country that has signed up to international agreements. A mechanism exists to resolve this issue and it can be resolved with some goodwill and common sense.

Written Answers are published on the Oireachtas website.

Common Agricultural Policy: Statements

Acting Chairman (Deputy Kathleen Funchion): We are moving on to statements and questions and answers on the Common Agricultural Policy, CAP, negotiations. I call the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy McConalogue. The Minister has 20 minutes.

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I welcome this opportunity to speak to the House regarding the ongoing CAP negotiations. Since 1962, the CAP has undergone several evolutions and, indeed, sometimes revolutionary changes concerning its scope and objectives. This long-standing policy began with the aim of supporting food production in Europe and I believe that aim is still every bit as valid today. The CAP has evolved since being formed and now plays a much wider role. Production supports have been replaced by decoupled payments and the introduction of cross-compliance, greening requirements and convergence have embedded environmental actions and the targeting of supports as part of the CAP. Today the CAP contributes to a broad range of objectives that are as much social as economic, but at its core remains the need to support our food producers – the farmers and their families.

We must be clear, however, that we are in the midst of another evolution of the CAP and we will see a different CAP to the one we saw before. The next CAP will have to meet challenges, namely, around having a greater climate ambition while still ensuring our world-class farmers can continue to feed the world in a safe and sustainable manner. Critically, the CAP must cater for the first principles: we need to continue to produce quality and sustainable food, for which there will be increasing demand. We must support farmers and rural communities and, while we are doing that, we also must ensure environmental sustainability. Enormous demands, therefore, are being placed on the new Common Agricultural Policy.

Ireland is the sustainable food capital of the world and we must not do anything that would stop our farmers from doing what they do best. As a country that is one of the most food-secure nations in the world, exporting 90% of all food produced, Ireland is not exporting a problem. We are exporting a solution of sustainable food production to more than 180 countries. In June 2018, the European Commission launched its proposals for the next Common Agricultural Policy with an increased focus on higher environmental and climate ambition. Ireland and Irish farmers should not be fazed by this ambition as we have led the way in our climate ambitions overall. In the last CAP programme, Ireland was second only to Finland in our environmental spending under Pillar 2, ahead of countries like France, Germany, Austria and Denmark.

An overall target of 40% of the total CAP budget will be allocated to environmental actions. The proposals also included further targeting of direct payments, with proposals for capping and redistribution measures and further internal convergence. A new governance structure of a single national CAP strategic plan and a new delivery model with a focus on outcomes and performance was also proposed. In October 2020, I, along with my European ministerial colleagues, agreed a general approach to the new CAP. It is critical to note and dispel one of the mistruths around the new CAP. It was at that meeting where we saw the overall CAP budget increased marginally. Ireland played a key role in delivering this increase and our stance on CAP has been one which has led the conversation in Europe to deliver on that. It was proposed to allocate 20% of the direct payment envelope to support the introduction of eco schemes and to include an enhanced baseline for environmental conditionality. The Council general approach also provided for broad flexibility for member states to take account of their own national cir-

cumstances.

The Council general approach supported the new governance proposals, including that the next CAP will be implemented through a new structure of a national CAP strategic plan. Each member state will have to set out an overall plan, covering all expenditure under Pillar 1 and Pillar 2. This new approach aims to support actions across both pillars in a consistent and coherent manner, while the new delivery model focuses on assessing the impact of the substantial investment which will be made under the next CAP. The European Parliament also reached its position on the Commission's proposals in October 2020, and it has included higher targets for environmental spending, including 30% for eco schemes. It is seeking a more prescriptive approach, with less flexibility for member states. This is particularly the case regarding the redistribution of payments, where the European Parliament is seeking 100% convergence and a mandatory 12% level of redistribution.

The Portuguese Presidency aims to reach a conclusion on the Common Agricultural Policy before the end of its term and we had hoped to achieve that in May. However, it was not possible, despite me and my European colleagues wanting to see a deal. I worked hard with them to try to achieve a deal at that last council meeting. It was disappointing that the European Parliament did not step up to the mark and genuinely engage in negotiations. That is why talks ultimately broke down. The Parliament must now front up and take these negotiations seriously.

From the beginning the new proposals have been the subject of extensive consultation and that will continue. Even before the draft regulations were published, national consultation had started in Ireland on the new CAP. Currently the CAP consultative committee, which includes broad-based representation, provides a forum for ongoing consultation and updating of stakeholders with regard to the negotiation process. My officials have undertaken modelling work on the direct payment proposals which has been provided to stakeholders and published. This work is designed to keep farmers informed at all stages of the process.

I have been always clear that I am seeking as much flexibility as possible in the final outcome. We need a CAP that will work for Ireland, our farmers and the wider agricultural sector. Some in the Dáil support the position that Europe should be setting the CAP path for Ireland but I entirely reject this approach as it does not support our farmers. What works in Malta will not work in Maam Cross and what works in Croatia will not work in Carndonagh and we cannot ignore this fact. The stance of wanting Europe to arbitrarily set the standards by which our farmers should farm is not one that will suit us best and I cannot understand why Sinn Féin, in particular, is supporting it.

When the final parameters of the regulations are agreed, we will then have certainty regarding our options. As Minister, I will engage closely with farmers and their representatives. The reality is that the next CAP will have to arrive at a balanced outcome and this will be no easy task. This can sometimes be overlooked when people focus on a particular aspect of the CAP on its own. There are nine separate objectives for the next CAP, with a tenth overarching one of agricultural knowledge and information systems. This cannot be a single issue, single focus new CAP for Ireland. We have to reach a balance that recognises the need to successfully manage the many demands on the CAP including the production of safe, high-quality food, support for farmers' livelihoods and rural communities as well as the maintenance of sustainability throughout all of these choices.

I want to assure everyone that at the heart of our considerations will be Irish farmers and

farm families. As we reach the final stages of the negotiations, the issues that divide us now are the key ones to which I have already referred, namely the amount of expenditure allocated to environmental actions, the level of the baseline conditionality all farmers must comply with to receive any payments and the level and extent of redistribution. When we know what the parameters of redistribution are in the final regulations, we will have to undertake further modelling to ascertain the best choices for Ireland. The current system for payments has been in place for some time. When one makes changes to a long-standing system it is inevitable that challenging choices will have to be made. That is why I remain focused on obtaining the most national flexibility we can achieve.

I will meet again at the end of June with my European colleagues, when we will all be aiming to reach a conclusion on these issues and agree a new CAP at European level. A no-deal CAP does not bear thinking about. I continue to fight for the flexibility for Ireland to make decisions for Irish farmers and our country. I believe it is better for us if we can adapt the CAP proposals to take account of our own farming structure. As we draw up our plan, I am committed to continuing to engage with all and to consult widely and I look forward to hearing the views of Members today. Despite the next CAP looking different from its predecessors, it is my singular focus to ensure that our farmers can keep doing what they do best which is producing world-class food in a safe, traceable and sustainable manner. The CAP is crucial to our farmers and our farm families. Having been lucky enough to have been born and reared on a farm, I saw first-hand the benefit of the CAP and its impact on farm life as well as the rural economy. I understand the importance of a CAP that will serve Irish agriculture well over the next number of years.

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Martin Heydon): As we discuss the proposed new CAP today, it is important to take a moment to acknowledge the vital role it has played and will continue to play in the future for Irish agriculture and for farm families. The CAP protects family farm incomes, supports the rural economy, ensures the production of high-quality safe food for consumers and protects rural landscapes and the environment. It is not a case of simply supporting farmers. It does so much more than that and is a policy that Ireland has continually led on and supported. We now owe it to our farmers and to the rural economy to deliver a new CAP that will continue to position Ireland as a sustainable food production capital of the world.

Across the European Union more than 10 million family farms are supported by the CAP. It supports job creation and economic growth and plays a vital role in rural areas in particular. Around 40% of the land area of the EU is managed under the CAP, so in addition to the provision of food, a range of public goods is delivered by CAP schemes. Ireland's agri-environment scheme, GLAS, supports almost 50,000 farmers to undertake actions which benefit biodiversity, landscape, water and climate change. The innovative approach of the European innovation partnership programmes has also seen strong participation in actions to support farming for nature.

Today the reality is that the EU, including Ireland, is a leader in sustainable agriculture while delivering high standards of food safety along with high standards in animal health and welfare. With the launch of the Green Deal as well as the farm to fork and biodiversity strategies, the EU has declared its intention to transform the sustainability of European food systems and to work collectively with its trading partners to achieve this on a global scale. Alongside the current European standards and achievements in the agrifood sector, we must now look forward to the changes proposed in the next CAP which will support this transformation to the

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next level. While we do so, we must ensure that our farmers and food producers are at the very centre of everything we do in CAP. We will continue to listen to and engage with our farmers as we navigate through CAP.

As we prepare to implement Ireland's national CAP strategic plan, we must be able to continue to support the production of quality food while recognising that the demands to improve outcomes from the environmental and public goods perspective have increased significantly. We have to prepare to meet these. In so doing, we must consider not just what we are doing now but how much more we will have to do to meet the future challenges. We need to improve outcomes with regard to sustainability. This is vital both for climate change and to ensure the protection and future success of our national agriculture sector. We cannot and will not stand still.

Over the years we have seen CAP supports ensure that the EU has developed self-sufficiency in food production and has become a major global exporter of quality food and drinks. As we move out of the acute stages of the Covid-19 pandemic we must acknowledge the vital role played by agriculture and Irish farm families, supported by the CAP, throughout the pandemic. Hard working Irish farmers and the operation of the EU Single Market have shown that the CAP can and does deliver. Our citizens, who have had much to worry about during the pandemic, did not have to worry about their food security. Let us be very clear that this policy is vital and the steps we take to implement the next CAP and the choices we make will have huge significance for the sector and for all of us. Our challenge is that the CAP must preserve food production and, with the same level of success, ensure sustainability.

The food and drinks industry is Ireland's largest indigenous industry, accounting for more than €14 billion in exports. As Minister of State with responsibility for new market development, this is a key area of focus for me. We are always proactively seeking out new markets to reward our farmers and processors. Ireland's reputation for safe, sustainable and nutritious food is recognised worldwide. This is exemplified by Origin Green, the world's first food and drink sustainability programme operating on a national scale.

Across Europe the introduction of the European Green Deal and the farm to fork strategy have put climate at the centre of all policy choices. We all recognise the important role the European agriculture sector must play in the achievement of a higher level of climate ambition over the period to 2050. However, we must also acknowledge the challenges that the farm to fork strategy will present for all member states.

Ireland has welcomed the vision of sustainability set out in the new Green Deal and the farm to fork strategy. We expect the new CAP to contribute closely to the achievement of these strategies. It will be important that any targets to be met are backed by comprehensive impact assessments and work is already underway on these. Targets must also take account of the different starting points of member states and the sectors concerned.

The CAP regulations and the strategic plans that are being prepared provide a good basis for incorporating the objectives of the farm to fork strategy. However, I do not believe that just one policy, even one as substantial as the CAP, could have the ability to deliver all of what is needed to achieve this ambitious vision. With such a high level of ambition, innovation will be necessary right along the food production value chain. Achieving this ambition will require new business models and partnerships with producers, industry and consumers all working together. However, none of us could argue with the ambition to move towards a healthier and

more sustainable food system. The next CAP can make a strong contribution towards this innovation in our most important indigenous sector. It will be vital that we achieve the necessary flexibility in the outcome at the European level to allow us to prepare the most impactful CAP strategic plan for Ireland.

Farm structures differ across Europe. If we are to ensure the correct support to achieve the change we want, we must be able to fashion our own destiny. This process will take place with ongoing consultation. There are differences of opinion and concerns. I recognise that it remains the most sensible and prudent course of action to deliver a CAP with the flexibility to make decisions for our farmers. However, we can see clearly that when farmers are offered environmental schemes that suit their farming systems, there is strong support for and substantial take-up of these measures. We can see this in the participation in GLAS and the European innovation partnerships initiative. Ireland has been a leader in implementing these innovative projects and I am delighted they will continue in the next CAP. Farmers are willing to engage and we need to provide schemes that support them. Ireland is only second to Finland in terms of environmental spend in the last CAP. Our farmers have long shown a massive commitment in this area. They are pioneers leading the charge and that will continue.

We must ensure clarity and coherence for farmers in the various requirements across the two pillars of the direct payments and Pillar 2 targeted measures. One of the areas on which Ireland has been seeking certainty for farmers is the definition of eligible hectare. We want to ensure there is no incentive for farmers to remove valuable bio-types and landscape features from their existing areas. This is a matter of extensive debate in the negotiations and we do not yet have certainty in this regard. In all of these debates there is a balance to be struck between the competing objectives of the CAP. However, we are trying to achieve certainty for farmers and we will continue to do so.

It will be important for all of us to proceed with an evidence-based approach. During the process, a number of exercises have been undertaken on the modelling of direct payments. These exercises can be considered further in conjunction with other material on farm payments and incomes such as CSO data and the Teagasc farm income analysis. This modelling work has all been published and is available on *gov.ie*. Further work is now under way on the redistributive elements.

There has been extensive consultation on direct payment options with the CAP consultative committee stakeholders and a separate questionnaire was issued to stakeholders in this regard. It is clear that these are not simple choices and there is a divergence in opinion on the options before us. Nevertheless, we will continue with this approach of further modelling and consultation with our stakeholders once we have flexibility to shape our future.

Ultimately, all Members, regardless of political persuasion, want the same outcome. We want a CAP that will keep our farmers doing what they do best, namely, producing a world class product which is exported to over 180 markets across the globe.

From my perspective in my role and with my responsibility in the Department for farm safety, I look forward to a higher level of farm safety ambition across this CAP being incorporated across all elements in Ireland. I also look forward to the consultative process we will have with all the stakeholders for the rest of this year to ensure that becomes a reality.

There will be challenges on the road ahead but we must stand firm and stand with our

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farmers to show we are there for them. There will be change but change does not have to be negative. The Government is with farmers every step of the way. We attach importance to our family farms, the top class sustainable food production systems we have in this country and the vital role farming and agriculture play in the rural economy across the island. With that, I welcome this opportunity for debate and discussion.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I thank the Minister and Minister of State for attending, although I have to say that for the past 20 minutes, we heard pure rhetoric, with nothing new and no position being taken on the areas of substance. The word “flexibility” was used countless times in both the Minister and Minister of State’s contributions. I cannot check exactly how many times it was used because their speeches have still not been circulated. Let us make no bones about it and let us be honest. When the Minister and Minister of State say “flexibility” they mean they want to be able to maintain the *status quo*. Flexibility in Irish Government-speak in this instance means more of the same.

The previous CAP had flexibilities on convergence. The Irish Government pursued the absolute minimum of 60% that was permitted. The previous CAP allowed the mechanism and the flexibility for a government to put in place upper limit payment levels. The Government used that flexibility to ensure that a small cohort of corporate entities remained in the position to draw down hundreds of thousands of euro. The difficulty is that whenever Irish Governments have been given flexibility, they have always used it to benefit the chosen few.

The second bizarre claim by the Minister is that all of a sudden he is a defender of Irish sovereignty at EU level. When he said the European Parliament is causing him so many problems he failed to mention that the reason the European Parliament has so much power is that Fianna Fáil gave it this power in the Lisbon treaty. Sinn Féin articulated at the time that it would undermine the voice of Irish agriculture in CAP talks if the European Parliament had such a say in the deliberations. Fianna Fáil accused us of scaremongering and now the Minister is saying the European Parliament is making an extremist proposition.

The area in which the Minister was most disingenuous was in his statement on the overall budget. The facts are as follows. By the end of the next multi-annual financial framework, MFF, Ireland will be contributing an additional €1 billion per year to the European budget. The CAP budget will be receiving €100 million less. Those are the cold facts. The CAP’s share of the next EU budget will fall from 37% to 30%. That is the agreement the Government made at European level. The least the Ministers can do is be upfront with farming organisations and farmers the length and breadth of the country on the reason they are being pitted against each other in respect of that same budget. It is because the Minister negotiated and agreed a bad deal. He is now going to the European negotiations to argue against the majority of Irish farmers. That would be a bizarre position were it not for the fact that the Minister is just the latest in a long line of Ministers with responsibility for agriculture who have taken that exact position at an EU level.

We know why there is a need for redistributive measures. It is because under the current system for which the Minister wants to maintain flexibility, Larry Goodman is able to claim €414,000 per year. A stud farm in Kildare owned by a sheikh is drawing down €222,000 per year. That money is supposed to go to Irish farmers and the Government is looking for the flexibilities to maintain the current position. Our farmers are consistently being asked to deliver more while being paid less.

There is a new format for the eco schemes, which the Government is trying to reduce in the negotiations. To return to the EU budget, why did the Government not demand that a separate Pillar 3 with new EU funding be provided? The inference from the figures the Department is producing is that this is new money or a new scheme with new criteria, which does not form part of the basic payment. If it does not form part of the basic payment, that means that in reality the cut to the CAP budget has been even more significant than I have outlined.

I have said time and again that our farmers need fair play. That means that if they are asked, as they should be, to do more in the area of climate action, they need to be compensated for the work they are doing, and are willing to do. They need fair prices. Yet again, they are waiting for the great measures that would provide fair prices, which the Minister promised to deliver when he was in opposition.

Crucially, farmers need a fair CAP. That means there has to be redistribution. The Minister has yet to say what redistributive measures he will require. Let us recall that full convergence would deliver more income to 72,000 family farms. That is 60% of Irish farms and the proportion is even higher in the Minister's constituency. Despite this, the Government is blocking talks at EU level and fighting against full convergence. As a member of the Opposition, the Minister demanded continued convergence, even during the transition period. We do not know what the Minister is saying now about the position. We know that front-loading payments would disproportionately benefit smaller and medium-sized farmers. We do not know what the Minister's position is on that matter. We still do not know what upper limit payment cap the Minister believes should be in place. I have short questions to which I would appreciate short answers. I believe the upper limit payment without any loopholes or preconditions that any enterprise should be receiving under the CAP pillar 1 payment is €60,000 per annum. What does the Minister believe should be the limit?

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: I thank the Deputy. I am glad he thinks the cap should be €60,000 because he has followed the position of Fianna Fáil in that regard.

Deputy Matt Carthy: That €60,000 is without preconditions.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: Prior to that, the Deputy's position was that the cap should be €80,000.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Is the Minister's position that the cap should be €60,000 without preconditions?

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: I set out that the cap should be €60,000 and the Deputy toddled along afterwards.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Is the Minister saying the position of the Irish Government is that the limit should be €60,000 per annum?

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: The Deputy has the audacity to stand here and try and sell that as being his own policy. In the same way, he is also trying to take some ownership of the ombudsman's office for which he had previously suggested no allocation or support.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Will the Minister answer the question? Does he now support the upper limit payment being set at €60,000 without preconditions?

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: At European level, I have been pushing at all Council

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meetings to try to keep the maximum limit that can go to one farmer as limited and small as possible.

Deputy Matt Carthy: That is okay.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: My objective was to achieve a cap of €60,000. I have been pushing for that at EU Council level. I have pushed for it the most of all the representatives of EU member states. It remains to be seen what will be the final level.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Let us see what flexibilities are there for that. My time is limited and I have a second question.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: I will make the following point. The Deputy's policy was for an €80,000 cap until I set a policy of a €60,000 cap. He followed on in that regard so he should not be coming in here today and trying to sell himself as the author of that policy.

Deputy Matt Carthy: The difference between the Minister and I is that he is in a position to deliver on policy. What level of convergence does the Minister think should be in place? I ask him not to say he is waiting to carry out analysis. He was an Opposition spokesperson on agriculture for a term of government and has been in office for almost a year. What is his position? What should that figure be?

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: My position is that we should be able to have a national debate and discussion on this matter.

Deputy Matt Carthy: We have had a national debate for the past 20 years.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: We have not.

Deputy Matt Carthy: We have.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: We have not. The Deputy's position is that Europe should set that level.

Deputy Matt Carthy: That is not my position.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: It is his position. That is what he has said here today.

Deputy Matt Carthy: My position is that there should be full convergence. That was the Minister's position a little over 12 months ago.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: The Deputy is saying that I should go over to Europe and decide arbitrarily what should happen on convergence. My position is clear.

Deputy Matt Carthy: What is the Minister's position?

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: We need to be able to have a national consultation over the summer on this matter involving farmers from Donegal to Kerry and from Wexford to Meath. We must look at all the issues inside and out and then decide.

Deputy Matt Carthy: May I ask the Minister the following question?

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: I do not see it as my role to go out unilaterally and arbitrarily at European level and set convergence without consultation with farmers across the

country.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Why did the Minister sit on a platform with me at a hotel in Letterkenny in a roomful of farmers and say categorically his position was that he was in favour of full convergence?

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: The Deputy was obviously not paying attention because I did not say that. I said I would continue convergence during the transition period. Since my appointment as Minister, there has not been sufficient time to do that for this year. I will consider the position as it will impact next year. I hope we will be able to agree a national position on the next CAP in advance of that. I have been always consistent and the Deputy should have paid a little more attention. The Deputy's party got it wrong in taking a position and then followed Fianna Fáil. I have been clear that there needs to be consultation and engagement on this CAP. There needs to be full engagement with farmers on anything that impacts on farm family incomes across the country.

Deputy Matt Carthy: In other words, the Minister still does not have a position on that matter.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: My position is not letting Europe set the cap, which is the Deputy's position.

Deputy Matt Carthy: The Minister has been a defender of sovereignty and has fought for flexibility to ensure decisions are made at a national level. That is laudable. Will he ensure the CAP strategic plan that is being sent by the Irish Government is first approved by the Dáil?

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: More than that, I will ensure that I engage with farm organisations and farmers right across the country on this issue. The Deputy and every Member of the Oireachtas will have an opportunity to have an input to that discussion.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Will we have an opportunity to vote on the matter?

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: The Government, having consulted with the Deputy and everyone else, will then formulate our national CAP policy.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Will the Minister bring that before the Dáil?

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: This is a Government role.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I take it, therefore, the Minister will not bring it before the Dáil.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: More importantly, I will bring it to farmers.

Deputy Matt Carthy: The Minister will not allow the Oireachtas to have its say.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: "Of course, the overarching issue is going to be that of the budget ... We have to look at this against a backdrop where, in the past ten years, there has been a 20% drop in the income coming to Irish farmers from CAP ... It is crucial that a line be drawn under the matter and that those reductions be stopped. I do not believe any reduction in the next CAP will be acceptable." Those are the Minister's own words, which he spoke in 2018. He has failed to deliver. Farmers from Mayo are listening to the Minister say we have got a slight increase in CAP payments. One of the most pertinent issues in global economics right now is inflation. We have not figured in that here. Farmers know all about inflation as it affects the

cost of manure, diesel, services, insurance and everything else they need, particularly as it relates to the agri-environment schemes that are being offered. The Minister mentioned the green low-carbon agri-environment scheme, GLAS, but the actual bottom line of what farmers earned from GLAS, particularly those in the west of Ireland, was absolutely nothing like the scheme that was promised to them in the first place. In calculating the overall figures, as my colleague, Deputy Carthy, has said, we will be contributing an extra €1 billion per year to the EU while we are getting €80 million to €100 million less from CAP. If we are going to deal with this, the Minister cannot, when he goes out to consult with farmers, give them figures that are wrong. He needs to get his figures right in this regard.

I want the Minister to explain to farmers in Mayo why he is fighting against full convergence and front-loading that would bring an extra €11 million into the county. Farmers in Mayo want to know that and it is my main question to the Minister today. Mayo is one of the counties that would benefit most from bringing in equal levels of basic farm payments. Instead of the Government fighting and part-blocking the minority in Europe, it needs to look at what is happening on the ground. Farmers will be displeased to hear what the Minister has said. Those farmers have been loud and clear, the Minister just has not been listening to them.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: The budget is only marginally up on the previous seven-year programme. The Government fought to ensure there would be no cut to the funding. I wish it were far more. We fought to get our allocation as high as we could. There, unfortunately, has been downward pressure at EU level on the percentage of the overall EU budget that goes towards the CAP over recent years and decades. It has been, and will be, my objective as Minister to do all I can to support farm incomes. That is why, in terms of our national budget, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Michael McGrath, and I have delivered an 11% increase in the budget, year on year, at national level.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Kathleen Funchion): I apologise to the Minister but there is another speaker to come in during this time slot.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: There undoubtedly has been pressure applied at European level. The Deputy also made a point about fighting against convergence and that is not the case. We must have a discussion about our national CAP plan over the summer. What Deputies Conway-Walsh and Carthy are saying is that Europe should dictate what we do on this matter and that I, as Minister, should go over to Europe and seal a deal there without consulting with farmers. I have not taken a position on convergence yet.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Kathleen Funchion): We must move on to Deputy Tully.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: I will be consulting with farmers on the matter because it has significant implications for everyone.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Kathleen Funchion): I call Deputy Tully.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: We should not allow Europe to dictate the pace on this matter.

Deputy Pauline Tully: The CAP budget is starting from a lower base than in previous years. CAP currently makes up only 30% of the overall EU budget as opposed to the 37% it made up in previous years. We know the emphasis, going forward, must be on making farming sustainable and delivering environmental benefits. However, if the CAP budget continues to decrease,

it will mean farmers are being asked to do more for less money and that is not sustainable.

I am aware there are ongoing discussions at EU level on the method of redistribution of payments and, as previous speakers have said, Sinn Féin is in favour of full convergence and is of the opinion that payments should be capped at €60,000 so that a small number of very wealthy landowners cannot benefit to the tune of several hundred thousand euros while smaller farmers struggle to make ends meet. Full convergence would unduly affect some smaller farmers so we are calling on up to 20% to be ring-fenced for front-loaded payments for small and medium-sized farmers who previously benefited from valuable entitlements. Redistributive measures are essential to ensure CAP payments are fair.

I support and recognise the need for eco schemes, going forward, as we all do. Additional funding must be made available to farmers, however, over and above what they have been in receipt of up until now. Otherwise, we are asking farmers to do more for less money and that cannot be allowed to happen. It has been indicated that the new schemes will be result-based but other factors such as inclement weather, which could affect output, need to be taken into account. In fact, inclement weather is because of climate change. If, therefore, farmers are trying to take measures to reverse climate change, factors like this cannot be ignored and common sense must prevail. In addition, any unspent funds for eco-schemes must remain within the State and must not return to Europe.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Kathleen Funchion): I am sorry, Deputy, we are out of time. We must move on to the other speakers. I remind everybody asking questions in their slots to allow time for the answers. We must move on now to the Labour Party and Deputy Sherlock.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: I thank the Acting Chairman. How much time do I have, please?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Kathleen Funchion): The Deputy has six and a half minutes.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: I thank the Acting Chairman very much. I am grateful for the half.

I will start by aligning the issue of the CAP negotiations to the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021, which we will vote upon tonight. I want to align the two because I believe they are absolutely and utterly complementary. I want to get a sense of the Minister's perspective on what climate action measures or types of schemes he envisages will be put in place arising from a new CAP. What kind of funding mechanisms will be put in place for climate action?

Before my second question, let me first make a political point in that we completely disagree with the guillotining of this Bill this evening. There are hundreds of amendments, which we feel strongly should have been addressed. More time should have been given, for instance, to the issue of the elephant in the room, that is, the biogenic methane issue. Assurances are being sought by the farm organisations about how that will be dealt with in respect of carbon budgets.

Is the Minister assured that the climate Bill, as it is constituted at present, gives sufficient coverage to farmers such that any measures they put in place regarding climate adaptation or mitigation are adequately dealt with in this Bill? I suggest to the Minister that it is not adequately proofed so that one can take into account the measures farmers themselves undertake with regard to offsetting the effects of biogenic methane. That is something on which we need clarity. I will come back in if I have time.

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Deputy Charlie McConalogue: I thank Deputy Sherlock. I will try to be brief. On the funding for climate action measures, the Deputy will be aware of the situation regarding the proposed CAP, whereby a minimum of 20% of Pillar 1 will now go towards eco-schemes. My objective there will be to make sure that however they are framed, those eco-schemes are accessible for farmers in order that they can actually participate in them but also that leakage from that is absolutely minimised so the farmer can retain that payment. While they will have to do things for it that make a contribution environmentally, they get to keep the payment. That is really important, particularly in Pillar 1.

With regard to Pillar 2 then, obviously, there will be a real, significant need for the continuation of many of the schemes that were there previously but also for a really good, strong, new agri-environmental anchor scheme. Importantly, to go along with the EU funding in this regard will also be the €1.5 million commitment from the carbon tax between now and 2030.

I believe the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill is very clear, particularly with regard to the socioeconomic importance of agriculture, of having to have full regard through the Climate Change Advisory Council and the Government. That is really important. Likewise, the science around biogenic methane is also really important in terms of ensuring agriculture is addressed in the way the science outlines and takes it into full account.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: I genuinely do not wish to put the Minister on the hook but all those of us who will support the climate action Bill tonight still feel strongly that not enough time was given to explore issues such as how biogenic methane would be dealt with, regardless of which side of the argument one is on. There is, however, a genuine concern on the part of farming organisations that the Bill does not sufficiently address the issue of biogenic methane in respect of issues like sequestration.

The Labour Party, for example, proposed an amendment regarding afforestation measures where we were seeking sectoral adaptation plans so that one would clearly define what the targets on afforestation would be. One could design schemes around that, which would benefit farmers, for instance. I was told they were ruled out of order because it would be a cost on the Revenue.

For those of us who are trying to think laterally - without being too rhetorical about it - we still have to grapple with the issue of biogenic methane one way or another. We need an honest debate about that. I feel strongly that it is important it is allied to CAP, particularly with regard to the pillars in respect of agri-environmental type schemes that will be coming down the track.

There would have been time within the climate action Bill to do that but instead the Government tonight is guillotining that. I do not mean to be disrespectful to the Minister but I do not think I am satisfied with the answer he has given in his response on biogenic methane. We remain to be convinced that there is enough within the legislation as it is constituted presently. There is not sufficient wording in that. There is not a proper locking mechanism in it that addresses the concerns of those genuine farmers, who actually want to be involved in carbon sequestration, carbon adaptation and carbon neutrality, but do not feel as if there is a pathway for them at present. That is the concern I am trying to address here. There are 30 seconds left in the slot for the Minister.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Kathleen Funchion): There are 30 seconds. Can the Minister be very brief?

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: That half minute is very important. Tremendous time has been given to the climate action Bill, both at the pre-legislative scrutiny stage and again in the Dáil. There is also a necessity here that we have to move on with it. If this was given all the time for every amendment, we could be here until next year debating it.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: I do not think so.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: We must move on but tremendous consideration has been given to it. The programme for Government commitments, particularly regarding biogenic methane and the socioeconomic importance of agriculture, are transposed into the Bill. That is really important. Ultimately then, this will come back to the Government to make the decisions around it. There is an obligation on the Government to follow the programme for Government, as well as the legislation, in that regard.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Kathleen Funchion): I thank the Minister. I am moving on to the Government slot. Deputy Calleary has four minutes.

Deputy Dara Calleary: I will continue from where Deputy Sherlock left off by linking today's debate on CAP to this evening's debate on the climate action plan. First, is the Minister satisfied that enough recognition has been given within the climate action plan to the efforts of Irish farmers and Irish agriculture? As for the ongoing issues that cannot be measured at the moment but which may be measured due to scientific advances in a couple of years' time, is there provision within that Bill for that to be allowed into our sequestration targets? There is no sense in us talking here about the good agricultural and environmental conditions, GAEC, proposals on sustainable incomes if there will be a difficulty for farmers coming down the line.

Second, I welcome the key commitment to make farm incomes sustainable. That is absolutely necessary because more and more people are actually beginning to give up on farming. Without out farmers, we do not have food. It is a simple fact but it needs to be repeated because many people do not seem to understand that.

Within this CAP programme and within these CAP proposals, what specific proposals will there be to encourage younger farmers to come in and stay within farming? What specific proposals does the Minister have in mind around the flexibilities he is seeking for the so-called forgotten farmers, for whom he has done a huge amount of work, to try to ensure that they are taken care of? On the challenges facing many of our sectors, including our sucklers but, in particular, our sheep and our hill farmers, what areas will be specifically tailored? What flexibilities, which he is seeking, will the Minister use to assist that sector to protect and grow their incomes and keep them on the land?

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: I am satisfied that the programme for Government commitments have been transposed into the climate action Bill with regard to ensuring that the socioeconomic importance of agriculture is recognised by the Government, and that the science around biogenic methane is very much central to all considerations, both at the Climate Change Advisory Council and by the Government thereafter. Ultimately, this will be a decision for the Government, looking across all sectors to see how best we can achieve our target. The programme for Government gives very clear regard to agriculture and that is transposed into the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill.

In regard to sustainable farm incomes, that issue absolutely has to be central to all we do in government in terms of supporting farmers. That is why I am focusing at European level on

making sure there is the capacity in the national CAP plan to give full consideration to the different sectors in farming and how we can best support them. It is also why we have delivered an 11% increase in the budget for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine this year, to support farm families, maintain many of the schemes that are in place and enable new schemes to come into operation. One of those schemes is the results-based environment agri pilot programme, REAP, under which Galway and Mayo are the two counties with the largest numbers of farmers participating. Many of them are sheep farmers, which the Deputy mentioned. That is a very important sector and one I have worked to ensure is central to the CAP and fully supported under it. In the case of young farmers, at least 3% of overall CAP funding will go towards supporting them. We must ensure there are young farmer top-ups as part of that. We will also look at other schemes and engage with all farmer representative organisations, including Macra na Feirme, in drawing up our national CAP plan to see how we can ensure moneys allocated make a real impact in genuinely supporting young farmers to enter the industry and renew our farmer base.

The Deputy also mentioned the forgotten farmer issue, which we have discussed on a number of occasions. I have asked officials to put together a report looking at all the ins and outs of this issue, because there are many complications in it and farmers are impacted in different ways, with a view to trying to accommodate them as part of the next CAP and ensure they get a fair deal. There is no doubt many of them missed out under previous CAP provisions because of the timing of their entry into farming and other issues. It is really important that they get full recognition and I am working to ensure that is done under the next CAP.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Kathleen Funchion): The next speaker is Deputy Cathal Crowe but I do not see him in the Chamber. Is Deputy O'Connor taking the seven and a half minutes allocated to his colleague?

Deputy James O'Connor: Yes. Deputy Cathal Crowe is unable to attend the debate as he is at a meeting of the transport committee to discuss aviation. I am glad to have an opportunity to talk about some of the very significant changes that are coming down the line in terms of the CAP. I speak as somebody from a community that has greatly benefited from the current CAP. We must acknowledge that Ireland is a country with a range of different farming needs. Constituencies such as the Minister's in Donegal are miles apart, from both a topography and agriculture point of view, from my constituency of Cork East, where there is a great deal of intensive agriculture on which thousands of livelihoods are based. In my constituency, the sector includes people working in a primary role as farmers as well as those involved in the production of dairy produce. In fact, the dairy sector in Cork East is far and above one of the most developed in the country. I am thinking also of neighbouring constituencies like County Waterford, which is over the bridge from Youghal, where I am from, County Tipperary to the north, as well as counties Kilkenny, Carlow, Wexford and Kildare. Agricultural activity in those places is poles apart from the situation in parts of the northern section of the country.

From my perspective, it is important to give the Minister an outline of the grassroots situation in my constituency, based on what people have been telling me and what I know is coming down the line as a result of the changes in convergence. The honest truth is that it is not good. I am gobsmacked today to hear one Sinn Féin Deputy after another slamming the Government on the requirement for 100% convergence. Do they have any idea or clue of the effect that would have on the provinces of Munster and Leinster? It would be devastating for people working in dairy farming and tillage. I see Deputy Carthy is smiling. He is a disgrace and what was said is absolutely outrageous.

To be fair to the Minister, he is new to his job. I very much look forward to getting him down to my constituency. He needs to hear the effect the CAP reforms will have on farmers at a grassroots level in my community and constituency. I grew up on a dairy farm and am one of the few people in Dáil Éireann about whom I can confidently say that our weekends at home involve milking cows. I am extremely worried about the reforms that will be contained within what the European Commission is currently looking at implementing.

I want to use my time to speak about some of the other aspects of what is going on in regard to CAP reforms. On sustainability, it is critically important that if we are going to be forcing climate measures on farmers in this country, we also reward them effectively for the good work they can do in terms of boosting biodiversity. There are also possibilities in terms of energy generation on farmers' lands. We must look at addressing comprehensively the crisis we are currently going through in the area of forestry. Anybody working in the forestry industry will tell the Minister that Ireland is miles from where it needs to be compared with our European colleagues in terms of the production of timber and, from a biodiversity point of view, coverage of timber. We are far behind where we need to be in that regard. Perhaps the Government should look at this issue before forcing fines, additional inspections and new measures around biodiversity and climate sustainability on ordinary farmers. They are already under enough stress.

Regarding energy generation, I have made the point before that I am very fortunate to have had a bit of experience working in energy. Farmers in this country are huge users of energy, including electricity. Looking at the role of the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, SEAI, is one mechanism, through the Minister's Department, by which we might further advance microgeneration. This is an issue we spoke about when we were trying to form a Government. We need to see whether there are possibilities for farmers to get seriously involved in selling energy back to the grid. The people of rural Ireland would much prefer to get their electricity on a local basis through microgeneration than to be blighted by large wind farms that destroy the countryside and should all be offshore. I feel very strongly on this particular issue.

I am interested in the Minister's reply to my points about microgeneration and forestry. I am leaving him approximately three minutes to come back on those particular points and what he plans to do to address the issues. I hope he acknowledges my comments as those of someone from a different part of the country from him and coming from a very different perspective in terms of the dairy industry, which we do not hear enough about in this House.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: I thank the Deputy. His points on convergence speak to the challenges that arise in different parts of the country in this regard and also the importance of having a full national debate and consultation on the issues. They also speak to the fact it would not be appropriate for a Minister, without having had that consultation and full engagement with farmers of all types, from Donegal to Cork and every other county, to go off to Europe, as Sinn Féin and some others would say I should, and decide the matter arbitrarily. It will be a challenging debate to have. The budget at European level is now agreed and set and there is a defined pot. What is not set is how it is distributed and how that will impact on various sectors. Working with my European colleagues, I hope that by the end of this month, we will be able to agree the CAP plan at European level. It is really important then, over the next number of months, that we have a full engagement and consultation at national level, right across the country, before making a final decision. I certainly will engage with farmers of all types because this issue is important in terms of farm incomes and it has very different impacts in Donegal, for instance, compared with Cork. There needs to be that engagement at national

level with our farmers.

In regard to microgeneration, there certainly is a lot of potential and opportunity. My Department has been engaging with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications and the Minister, Deputy Eamon Ryan, on this issue. There is significant potential that we need to look at developing. We are considering ideas in terms of how we can develop the potential of farmers to contribute to our energy sector.

Likewise, there is a lot of untapped potential nationally in terms of forestry. There have been very significant challenges in recent months within the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in regard to licences. Both the Minister of State, Senator Hackett, and I are working very hard to address those challenges because they have been inhibiting to the sector. There is a great deal of potential for farmers in the coming years, not just in traditional forestry but also in terms of how it can be part of a whole-farm system. We must embrace the opportunities, including opportunities for significant income generation for farmers.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Kathleen Funchion): I thank the Minister. We move now to Sinn Féin. Deputy Mairéad Farrell has two and a half minutes.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: Acting Chairman, I am in this speaking slot as well.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Kathleen Funchion): I apologise to the Deputy but his time was taken by his colleague because he was not here.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: Yes but I have been indicating to come in.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Kathleen Funchion): I am sorry but apologies were given that the Deputy was attending a transport committee meeting. We must move on. I will see if there is a way of slotting him in.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: I was actually here indicating.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Kathleen Funchion): I apologise to the Deputy but his time was taken by his colleague. I checked that at the start.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: I think there were 50 seconds still left on the clock.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Kathleen Funchion): No, I am sorry but there were not. I apologise but you were not here. I checked with your colleague and he said he was taking your time-----

Deputy Cathal Crowe: I was here.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Kathleen Funchion): -----that you had sent your apologies because you were at the transport committee. Deputy Mairéad Farrell has two and a half minutes.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: Tá ceist fíor-shimplí agam don Aire. Cén fáth go bhfuil sé ag troid i gcoinne CAP a bheadh níos fearr d'fhormhór na bhfeirmeoirí ar fud an iarthair, ar fud ceantair Ghaeltachta, ina chontae féin i nDún na nGall agus i mo chontae, Contae na Gaillimhe? Mar gheall ar a dhearcadh agus dearcadh páirtithe an Rialtais, tá feirmeoirí atá ag streachailt cheana féin, atá ag cur seirbhísí agus earraí fíorthábhachtacha ar fáil dúinn ar fad agus atá ag déanamh oibre iontach, chun cailleadh amach ar na milliúin euro. Tá Gaillimh chun cailleadh

amach ar €5.3 milliún, Ciarraí ar €11.3 milliún agus Maigh Eo ar €11.4 milliún. Tá sé doch-reidte céard atá ar siúl ag an Rialtas. Bhí an tAire ar son coinbhéirseachta agus é mar bhall den Fhreasúra ach anois agus é sa rialtas tá dearmad iomlán déanta aige air seo. Ba cheart go mbeadh íocaíochtaí lochtaithe tosaí ann. Tá sé go hiomlán mí-fhéarálte go bhfuil beirt fheirmeoirí atá ag déanamh an phoist cheannann chéanna ag fáil íocaíochtaí éagsúla mar gheall ar bhealach measta atá bunaithe ar bhearta táirgiúlachta ó 20 bliain ó shin. Níl sé seo féarálte agus tá muintir na Gaeltachta ag fulaingt dá bharr.

I have a simple and straightforward question for the Minister. Why is he arguing against measures that would benefit the majority of farmers, including those in his own home county of Donegal and indeed those in my home county of Galway? Quite simply, the Government's being against the redistribution of funds to farmers in western counties will see Galway farmers lose out on €5.3 million. Many of these farmers are already struggling and are doing absolutely vital work. The Minister was in favour of convergence when in opposition. I note he told my colleague, an Teachta Carthy, that he was only in favour of continuing convergence through the transition period but I am pretty sure if farmers in my home county of Galway and in his own home county of Donegal were asked, they would say the Minister set himself on a platform of convergence. He himself has highlighted that small to medium-sized farmers with valuable entitlements might suffer. Why is he resisting this? Why is he continuing to treat farmers in County Galway in a fundamentally unfair way? The CAP has moved on; productivity measures linked to the early 2000s should have no bearing. How can the Minister justify paying two farmers who are doing the exact same job different amounts based on those outdated metrics?

Deputy Claire Kerrane: In 2020, over €3.6 million in direct payments went to just 20 farm enterprises, while average CAP payments in counties Roscommon and Galway are about €10,000 and many farmers receive much less. At the same time, some individuals are receiving between €200,000 and €400,000-plus in CAP payments. This is not right, it is not fair and it is something we should be fighting tooth and nail to end in these current negotiations. I welcome what the Minister said about confirming an upper limit of €60,000, which is what he is seemingly fighting for in Europe. It is welcome. Speaking as someone who was born and raised on a beef suckler farm, and who has lived there all my life, 100% convergence is fair. It will benefit up to 72,000 farmers. Some farmers, especially those who are receiving tens of thousands more than the average farmer in the likes of counties Roscommon and Galway currently get, will receive less. There will be those who are on huge amounts now who will lose out but it will be to the benefit of all farmers across the State.

I want to make reference to the new pilot environmental scheme, which was labelled as "REPS 2" ahead of the general election. Instead, it is a move to a payment-by-results model that will put huge pressure on farmers. Under it farmers may lose out on payments due to factors like weather which are totally out of their control. The scheme is extremely limited as far as participant numbers are concerned and that is due to the tiny allocation of €10 million that has been provided for it. It is also really disappointing that those farming land containing heather were immediately excluded from that pilot programme. As has been said, eco-schemes are now more important than ever but we must remember farmers are taking part in environmentally-friendly practices and they will continue to do so. However, they must be compensated for it in a very simple and straightforward way. They must be rewarded for what they are doing.

On Pillar 2, what reduction are we looking at for the rural development fund, which is really important? I must also state that many farmers and their families are really struggling, particularly beef farmers. The income is not there any more, costs are increasing all the time and there

is nothing there for young farmers. We must therefore ensure that we do right by them in these negotiations.

Deputy Holly Cairns: I have repeatedly sought clarification on the Government's position on the CAP negotiations, and that the Dáil could vote on those proposals. Regrettably, the Minister's replies have been vague and there has not been any scrutiny or accountability in relation to his position on the CAP, not to mention a vote. The protests last Friday across Ireland and the submissions to the agriculture committee indicate the frustration and confusion among farming communities. This far into the negotiations, on a policy that will shape Irish agriculture and the landscape for years to come, we should all be crystal clear on the Government's position and what farmers can expect.

The priority for Government must be supporting family farms and truly sustainable practices. The Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmers Association has called for family farms to be protected in the negotiations, to ensure the viability of small-scale agriculture. The Irish Natura and Hill Farmers Association has highlighted the benefits of greater flattening of payments. The Minister needs to follow the principle of supporting small farms. While we know there potentially will be winners and losers in any changes to a policy, the obligation must be to support as many farmers as possible. The CAP must support the many, not the few.

Second, we need sustainable farming, which is the only way rural Ireland as we know it can survive. However, the Government's mixed messaging and inconsistent approach undermines the drive for sustainability. The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill fails to define clear targets for emission reductions in each sector. It fails to robustly define any semblance of a fair transition. This is crucial for farming communities. It does not even attempt to provide the reassurance farmers and workers need. The protests last week indicate the uncertainty and fear out there and while it is being politically stoked up by certain politicians and there has been much scaremongering, the Government has not helped. We need a strong just transition policy to ensure the inevitable changes are fair and supported.

The results-based environmental agri pilot, REAP scheme, is another example of this confusion. It has limited scope, those on the organic and GLAS schemes are ineligible for it and now there is the unexplained exclusion from it of over 6,000 farmers. Also excluded is commonage, land with gorse and heather and so-called marginal land. This overlooks the carbon sequestration capacity of these areas, blatantly disincentivising the very thing we need more of. We need schemes like REAP but we need them to be more ambitious, more consistent with sustainable practices and open to as many farms as possible.

The withdrawal of the environmental pillar from the Agri-Food 2030 strategy committee is another worrying indicator. The group points out that this industry-led approach is incompatible with the action needed in the face of our climate and biodiversity crisis. The Government is looking for more flexibility at national level for Ireland's interpretation of the CAP, which the Minister keeps referring to, but we have no idea what this interpretation will look like in terms of Irish policy. Farmers want and need certainty and leadership on this. It is clear from meetings, protests and committee statements what farmers want. It is now up to the Minister to clarify his position and plans. We have yet to find out what he wants. In his speech he stated "In October 2020, I, along with my European ministerial colleagues, agreed a general approach to the new CAP." I wonder what it is. He then clarified the European Parliament's position by stating the "Parliament is seeking 100% convergence and a mandatory 12% level of redistribution". That kind of clarity on the Minister's own position is what everybody is asking

for. Deputy Carthy spoke about being in Letterkenny but whatever about all that, we know the Minister's position when in opposition was for 100% convergence. It is fair enough if he has changed his mind; we are all entitled to do that, but would he not just come out and explain to the House why, where he is coming from and let farmers know? The Minister also stated, "I have been always clear that I am seeking as much flexibility as possible in the final outcome" but what will he do with the flexibility? Everybody is looking for that answer. Does the Minister realise that his comments leave us none the wiser?

The Minister is now the one at the CAP negotiations and interpreting CAP policy for Ireland. In that context, will he tell us what tangible difference there is or will be between this Government's policy and that of the previous Government? What will the Minister do with convergence and why has he changed his stance? What will he do with all the flexibility he has been pushing for?

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: I thank Deputy Cairns. I have a couple of comments on the policies of this Government and what we are doing for farmers. The budget for the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine this year has increased by 11% in trying to support farm families, which demonstrates the prioritisation we give to supporting farmers in the work they do. I am progressing work on establishing a food ombudsman's office and I have just closed the consultation process on that. It again demonstrates the commitment to transparency in the food supply chain. Those are two very clear examples.

The Deputy mentioned the REAP scheme, which was five times oversubscribed. Farmers really recognised how beneficial it was to them. It is easy to quibble about certain elements of the scheme but the bottom line is that when farmers looked at it in detail, despite much of the protest we might have seen in the Dáil, they realised the benefit of the scheme in terms of income and accessibility. Unfortunately, we could not accommodate everybody as it was a pilot scheme constrained by the terms and conditions of the transition period under the CAP. There is nothing secretive about why 6,000 more participants could not get into it. I managed to push it as far as I could so that 5,000 people could participate, despite the constraints.

The Deputy has mentioned before matters relating to convergence and redistribution and I will clarify them. While in opposition, my position was not that there would be 100% convergence. I am clarifying that so the Deputy does not repeat her comments to that effect. My position was that we should continue the convergence pathway to 75% during the transition period. Convergence would benefit my county very significantly but I have always recognised what a challenging issue it is. It is not something that should be arbitrarily decided by a Minister, or even worse, by Europe. That is what many people here are saying. It should be decided in consultation with farmers right across the country, and it is what I plan to do over the summer. I plan to consult all farmers, including those in the Deputy's constituency, my county and everywhere else. This is really important to all farmers and they should be involved with it.

This is not about a Deputy coming here and asking what a Minister will do or decide. My position is that I will engage with everybody in putting together a national CAP plan to try to get as fair as possible an approach to what is a very challenging matter. It is absolutely the right approach. I look forward to the Deputy's engagement and views on that as well.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Looking at the big picture for farming, once again Europe has failed to grasp the big nettle. Looking at dairy farming and particularly beef and sheep farming, putting aside the fixed grants that people get irrespective of productivity and as long as

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they have a very basic level of farming going on, the more intensively one farms, the smaller the profit that is made. When a farmer does up his or her accounts at the end of the year, the more intensive farmer will eat more into those grants. I have looked at endless sets of accounts and spoken to endless numbers of farmers. It is absolutely farcical that in this industry, the harder one works, the more intensively one works and the more efficiently one works, the less money is made. Until we grasp that nettle in an international sense, we will have problems in agriculture.

The Minister knows my view on convergence, which is that farmers with high output and very good land should make their money on price. Basing any grant on something that happened in 2001 or 2003 is foolish. A young farmer who is 25 now was five years old when this was settled and if his or her parents or grandparents owned the land, they may not have been farming it intensively. When I tried to ascertain the relationship between stocking intensities and single farm payment rates, the Department indicated that it could not give it to me because with all the buying and selling, the figure would be irrelevant anyway. There is no relationship to what happened in 2001.

Under the previous CAP, the greening payment was not subject to convergence and people continued to get the greening payment at the full 30% rate of what they had inherited from 2001 or what they had bought. What rate will now apply and will that rate continue for the greening part of what will be the new basic payment? We will not have time for the answer today but the Minister might send it on. This is a very fundamental question that I have not seen answered.

I am a little annoyed by commentary from certain farm organisations and leaders that disparages the part-time farmers as if they were happy farmers. The Minister and I know from representing marginal land areas that they are absolutely vital from an environmental perspective. We also know the most productive farmers would be at a loss from a European perspective if we did not have environmental areas.

Everybody forgets that in many cases, farming households on the west coast or in the poorer parts of every other county are dependent on the combined income from a very modest job and their farm to get a decent standard of living. We should remember that there are hilly areas, disadvantaged land and people on low payments in each county. We are talking about a real part of those farmers' annual income that is combined with their off-farm income. Many productive farmers have partners or spouses in very lucrative jobs. All farmers working for a serious income are important, whether they are big or small.

There is another matter that has gone unnoticed. In the north east, REPS amounted to €11,000 for many farmers and now the equivalent process amounts to €4,000, with major compliance costs arising in the context of planners. That is a loss of €7,000 and convergence to date in no way makes up for that loss. The percentage income loss for farmers who got the full rate under REPS and who are getting the current rate of what was GLAS is ginormous.

The reality is we need reform and Europe has baulked at that idea. I spent much time as a Fianna Fáil spokesperson on agriculture discussing price. I went over and back to Europe and people said they were interested. However, we have not dealt with the payment to primary producers. I grant the Minister that this is a worldwide problem but it is also a European one. Until we make it profitable to produce beef, lamb and so on, we will continue to destroy the productive farming we all need.

Deputy John Paul Phelan: I find myself in the rare position of not only sharing time with Deputy Ó Cuív but also agreeing with a few of his points. From first-hand experience, I am aware of what has happened to some of those involved in intensive farming, particularly farmers with dry stock, as a result of the fact that prices in the beef sector had been low until recently. Those in this group who were more involved in intensive farming tended to lose more money and were obliged to dip more into their single farm payment in order to keep the farms afloat. The Deputy also made a valid point about winners and losers that could emerge on the basis of what is being spoken about in this round of CAP discussions. There is poor land and there are disadvantaged areas in every county, not least in my county. It strikes me that Kilkenny and Carlow, the counties I represent, and neighbouring Wexford are, as the proposals stand, the three counties that could end up losing most. The farmers who benefit most from the single farm payment and have the highest entitlement are dry-stock farmers. They are generally not dairy men and women.

Many family farm enterprises operate using finance they are able to secure on the basis of their single farm payment. I fully support the Minister on capping. I have always supported the notion that there should be an upper limit. However, I am talking about the difference between a small-scale beef producer being a viable farmer and able to live and rear a family on the farm and potentially not being able to do so if we go to the extreme and opt for 100% convergence. I admire that the Minister is sticking to his guns as regards the 75% proposal. Many people do not appreciate that 60% convergence operates under the current CAP system.

I remind Deputies that the origins of the CAP was to produce food. I was a Member of the Oireachtas in the early 2000s when the single farm payment reference years were introduced. I agree with previous speakers that the reference years now bear little resemblance to the practice on the ground for many farmers and new entrants, whom Deputy Ó Cuív mentioned. I remember speaking against the idea of the single farm payment at a number of meetings of farming organisation at that time. My argument was that the payment would be used to reduce payments once the coupling was broken between production and payment. I accept that we will never go back to a fully coupled payment but I regret that the leading farming organisation did not see fit recently to support at least a partial coupling.

As I said, most of the farmer producers in the south east are not industrial scale operators. The counties I represent and surrounding counties, not the counties in the west, have, on average, the lowest disposable household incomes nationally. The south-east region also has had the lowest third level attendance rates for a long time. Hopefully that will change with the establishment of a technological university in the region. Many people depend on agriculture and families are reared and children are educated using the income from the family farm. Every Member who has spoken has referred to the importance of supporting the family farm but there are different definitions of what would constitute a family farm.

I am a firm believer in the original purpose of CAP. It was never designed to be a welfare payment. It was designed to aid production and to ensure we have safe food on the shelves of our shops and supermarkets. I worry that, in the medium term, some sort of food supply issue will break out across the European Union and potentially across the world. As a country that can produce more food than we already produce, Ireland has a moral obligation to do that to the highest animal safety and food production standards. I fear that many farmers in the livestock sector, which is subject to the volatility of prices and is the very sector that most Members want to support most strongly, could be adversely affected if there is a significant drop in their single farm payment or if we were to go anywhere near 100% convergence.

Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne: The main discourse around the CAP negotiations is pitting the small against the big farmer. It highlights how 100% convergence would see a big shift of money from the south and east to the north and west. The main narrative missing in this discourse is a vital player in this game, one who potentially stands to lose the most, namely, the farmer with a medium-size farm. Having spoken with farmers of this scale in my constituency of Clare, they have genuine concerns about the future viability of their farms.

Medium-sized farmers stand to lose a lot if they cannot come up with the resources to implement an eco-farm scheme as they will not qualify for CAP payments if they do not transition. Thus far there has been little or no clarity about what this eco-farm scheme will look like. This ambiguity is causing anxiety within the community. As one farmer said yesterday, the vagueness is crippling. Will the Minister create a third pillar of funding specifically for eco-schemes?

Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have landed us in a position where we can expect 7% less than in the previous EU budgetary cycle for CAP allocations, despite the fact that farmers are crying out for fairer deals and have a just transition to surmount. Farmers are again being asked to do more to receive less. Sinn Féin is calling for a third pillar of funding solely focused on environmental programmes dedicated to the transition of eco-schemes for small and medium-size farms which need support to navigate a just transition. I support the idea that if the money streamed into Ireland for these schemes goes unspent, it should remain in the country.

Sinn Féin has called for the capping of Pillar 1 payments to €60,000. The fact that there is no cap on these payments, while small and medium-sized farmers struggle to make ends meet is hard to swallow. Many farmers stay afloat because of the single farm payment, not the actual income generated by trading livestock. Last year, just 20 farm enterprises received €3.6 million in direct payments. This is illogical at best and corrupt at worst. One wealthy owner of a buoyant business received €414,000 of EU money that is supposed to be used to strengthen and develop our society as a whole, not the already mega-wealthy. It is an absolute disgrace.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: I agree with much of the commentary on the need to ensure the sustainability of the family farm. Beyond that, many people in the EU have forgotten what CAP was about, namely, the steady supply of safe food. The biggest problem we have is the reduced overall CAP budget. Its share of the overall EU budget has declined from 37% to 30%. What will this look like? Has the Department game-planned the cuts which will obviously be put to the back end of the budgetary cycle?

Could I also be allowed the liberty to find out, on behalf of the potato growers in my constituency and other areas, if there will be a derogation this year with regard to the desiccant, diquat? This is creating a difficulty. Many of the Members present attended a briefing at which we were told that the Department and other parties would provide an alternative. Potato growers are saying there is no alternative at this point in time. Perhaps the Minister will answer those queries.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: I thank Deputy Ó Murchú. I will take the second point on diquat first. The use of diquat has been suspended at EU level. There is ongoing engagement with Teagasc on alternatives and how to use them. I made it clear to farmers last year that this was the route they should take this year.

On maintaining sustainable family farm incomes, that is obviously a key objective in how we frame the next CAP and the impacts it might have. It is not straightforward and certainly

not black and white. The objective is to try to support family farm families in every way we can. There must be a clear objective of ensuring that we do not, by our actions, push some farmers who are currently struggling to farm full time into a position where they can only farm part time. We have seen this trend for decades and we must be conscious of it in framing our policies.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: I would like to check the position regarding budgetary cuts. If I am correct, they will be at the end of the EU budgetary cycle. Have we looked into this? What sort of cuts could we be looking at? Whatever difficulties we might have with convergence and flexibility at this point in time-----

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: Which budgetary cuts?

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: We are expecting the overall CAP budget to be reduced as a percentage. Therefore, we are looking at the multi-annual financial framework-----

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: We are clear at this point on what the budget will be between now and 2028. In monetary terms, it is narrowly up but in percentage terms, the overall CAP is down. This has been a challenge over many CAP cycles. If we include inflation, it reduces its impact in real terms. Monetarily, it has increased. Pillar 2 has increased by 20%. We have fought very hard to maintain the budget and to try to keep it as high as possible. It is becoming more and more challenging at European level but we are very committed to it. As I stated earlier, the 11% increase we delivered for the national budget this year shows the commitment we have nationally to supporting our farm families.

Deputy Alan Dillon: I thank the Minister, Deputy McConalogue, and the Minister of State, Deputy Heydon, for facilitating today's question and answers on the important CAP negotiations. It is also important to be sensitive when discussing the range of farming payments and the impact of potential changes to these payments. Often, they are critical income for farming families and particularly so in counties such as Mayo which I represent. It is also important to recognise that the value of CAP payments has significantly shifted from east to west since 2014. Payments to Mayo, Donegal, Galway and Kerry have increased substantially in recent years.

I wholeheartedly agree with the comments of the Minister on the opportunity to make decisions at national level. This is a very important step. His earlier comments summed up the main issues highlighted to me by farming organisations and farmers on convergence, the transition to eco-schemes and minimising the impact of eco-schemes on farmers' basic payments, which is an important step. The front-loading of payments has a significant impact on small and medium-sized farms, and should be best prescribed by member states at national level.

In policy terms, some have described convergence as being a crude measure that will severely hit farmers with a high payment per hectare but result in an overall lower payment. This has serious consequences for Irish farmers because of demographics, and I know the Minister is working hard to find solutions in this regard. As we heard earlier, an important step forward is seeking national consultation with farmers. It does not seem unreasonable to seek flexibility on policymaking at national level versus a blanket across the board approach. This is especially true when we consider the variance in agricultural and rural populations in EU member states.

The criteria for farmers to be eligible for eco-schemes must be practical and encourage the maximum number of farmers to participate. They should be designed to recognise farmers who are actively farming their land through environmentally positive actions. This should

be reviewed accordingly. A cost incurred or income sacrifice model would have a significant negative effect on farm incomes and should be avoided. We should be measuring positive environmental impacts.

The main issues I have raised with regard to CAP are convergence, eco-schemes and front-loading, and how they would impact a constituency such as Mayo or Donegal.

Deputy Christopher O’Sullivan: In his opening statement, the Minister referred to the fact he grew up in this world and this life, and I know he has the best interests of farmers at heart and will do his best to ensure the right balance is struck. What is often left out of this argument and debate is the value of farming and farming livelihoods to the local economy. The Pillar 1 basic payment we are discussing goes back into local communities, villages, towns, co-operatives and hardware shops as farmers buy fencing and farming materials. It really makes rural Ireland tick. This is why it is so important that we get this right and ensure we do not make farming unviable. We must instead do the opposite and increase the viability of farming. The Pillar 1 basic payment is very important in doing this.

I attended some of the IFA protests in my constituency, in Clonakilty, Bandon and Skibberreen. What is really clear is that farmers want to play their part in making farming sustainable, achieving emissions targets and improving the environment and biodiversity. What is also clear is that they want to be fairly rewarded for this and do not want to be out of pocket. There is a fear about the eco-schemes. Farmers welcome them, as we all do, and we need eco-schemes to improve sustainability and biodiversity. However, it does not make sense that 30% of the payment that goes to eco-schemes leaves farmers out of pocket. In other words, they are receiving less for the 30% they put into eco-schemes. What may happen if we do not get this right is that farmers will opt out of the eco-schemes. No one will benefit, neither the farmer nor the environment. It is so important that we get this right under Pillar 1.

With regard to Pillar 2 and proper agri-environmental schemes, the Minister mentioned the unbelievable take-up of the REAP scheme, which proves farmers want to do more. We need to get the agri-environmental scheme under Pillar 2 absolutely right. Deputy Ó Cuív spoke about payments under the old REPS of up to €11,000. We need to reward farmers for these measures to improve sustainability and biodiversity. If we do this, we will make farming viable and improve the environment. I would love to see the Department begin to clarify and explain. In the programme for Government we committed to putting €1.5 billion from carbon tax into agri-environmental schemes. We need to start giving farmers confidence this will happen.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I am a suckler and beef farmer. We are at a crucial moment in agriculture. We have to use the Common Agricultural Policy to pay money to farmers to make sure there is food on the table, as was the case with the CAP many years ago. We must also pay tribute to the many farmers the length and breadth of the country who produce a world-class product that we are able to sell into any market in the world. We can stand over our products. This did not come easily. It came through the hard graft of farmers who embraced a huge amount of regulation. They embrace it every morning they get up and every day they do their work.

Within the Common Agricultural Policy, it is important to ensure the family farm is made as sustainable as possible. It is a vital cog throughout the country. In my area of north-west Cork, and throughout Duhallow in north Cork, it is vital that there is a future for the family farm and that young people are encouraged to believe there is a future in farming to which they can look

forward. This has to be the cornerstone of the discussions we have and the final package that comes from Brussels.

The eco-schemes have to be well funded. Since the REPS was introduced approximately 25 years ago, many successful changes have taken place at the farm gate. Farmers have embraced these and we have seen huge improvements in the environment throughout the country. No matter what report or audit is done by the European Commission, Ireland or anybody else, it shows the money spent on eco-schemes has been used successfully to improve the environment. Farmers are the custodians of the environment and they have done very well with this over the years. It is very important there is a fundamental good and decent scheme that is well funded and can ensure farmers continue to do this. We must also recognise that we must not have regulation that is too cumbersome and that there is a streamlined scheme. Whatever final package is available, we must make sure we have at its core the family farm and that there is a proper workable eco-scheme for farmers.

I could debate this all day but there is only a short time available to me. We are at a crucial point in agriculture and we must make sure that we have to the forefront our biggest national indigenous industry, as other speakers have said, not only for the farm but also for the rural economy. The benefits of that cannot be measured merely in terms of having a viable agricultural industry.

Deputy Joe Carey: Following the same theme as the two previous speakers, we are at a crossroads here. It is a vital period for Irish agriculture. The medium-sized farm with good entitlement is considered by the EU to be the ideal family farm model. This model has taken the largest financial hit due to convergence. I am concerned that this family farm model was not financially supported in the previous CAP programme and it is imperative that this model is supported in the next CAP programme. This model is ideally set up to adopt and take on any new eco and climate schemes. In the short time available to me, I ask the Minister, Deputy McConalogue, to respond in particular in relation to the family farm, the family farm model and the sustainability of farming. What will the Minister do? What will he ensure will be in the new CAP that protects the family farm and gives a future to Irish agriculture?

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: We have environmental sustainability and social sustainability but what anchors our family farm system is financial sustainability. That will be crucial in framing well the next Common Agricultural Policy to support families. Also, there is what we do then at domestic national level to support that in terms of additional funding, such as the 11% increase this year in national funding and the carbon tax proceeds up to 2030 supporting a new environmental scheme which can deliver significantly, not only from an environmental point of view but also in terms of farm family incomes. Ultimately, that is what it is about. It is about rewarding farmers for what they do, both in producing good, healthy and safe food but also in producing environmental goods and ensuring that they are well rewarded for that, and are financially sustainable in the process.

Deputy Martin Browne: We are in a situation in which a debate is ongoing over how a diminished pot of supports is to be distributed among the country's farmers who are being asked to do much more in return for far less. It seems as though our farmers are being utilised instead of being supported.

The nature of the Common Agricultural Policy has changed from one that was supposed to assist farmers to engage in good practice with the benefits of high-quality produce being afford-

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able for the consumer. Instead, what we have seen is a Common Agricultural Policy the funds of which have in many instances fallen into the laps of the barons or those who are sitting back receiving payments but who are not actively engaged in farming while young farmers work their land for a pittance.

In the course of many conversations there have been about the Common Agricultural Policy, we have heard a lot about reform in relation to the latest one. Reform is meant to be about progressive change which considers those whom it will affect and tries to bring them along with it. Instead, farmers and rural communities, whose common economic fabric depends in large parts on their prosperity, have been asked for more in return for less. This started when the Government agreed to a CAP budget that was bad for our farmers and bad for our rural communities. We are a net contributor yet, under the current arrangement that involves this Government, the CAP now makes up only 30% - a huge reduction when compared to the previous budgetary cycle where it stood at 37%. This led to talks stalling over redistribution measures. The Government's position seems to be against redistribution, which will not be good news for many farmers, which leads me on to fairness and convergence, front-loading and how to ensure that the CAP, with all its flaws, is distributed in as fair a manner as possible.

As matter stands, Pillar 1 payments are linked to productivity figures based on the situation in the early 2000s, which, of course, has little to do with the reality today of family farms, yet there is opposition to averaging Pillar 1 payments. Moving to full convergence would be to the benefit of 72,000 farmers and if flexibilities are implemented in the way Sinn Féin has been proposing, effects on others can be avoided. With this in mind, Sinn Féin has called for up to 20% to be ring-fenced for front-loaded payments to protect small and medium-sized farmers who have historically valuable entitlements. We also have advocated a €60,000 cap in the maximum Pillar 1 payment to prevent a disproportionate amount going to those who need it least. In 2020, €3.6 million in direct payments went to only 20 farm enterprises. Although Larry Goodman received over €414,000 and a single stud farm owned by Sheikh Al Maktoum received €222,300, many farmers must live on subsistence levels of payment. Now they are being asked to comply with a Common Agricultural Policy that has a different overall aim. That aim, of course, is the crucially important green strategy on climate action. Eco-schemes are needed, and never more so, but the way payments are being devised will result in farmers themselves being asked to fund a disproportionate amount of the environmental measures as they replace the greening payment from the previous CAP. Sinn Féin was in favour of the introduction of the eco-schemes but we argued that they should be part of a new separate pillar with new funding.

Young farmers have also been left fighting for survival. In terms of the minimum allocation for young farmers, it seems as though it is closer to the 3% than the 4% Macra na Feirme, for instance, had been calling for. The difference equates to €14 million over the lifetime of the new CAP but the impacts would have a far larger effect that would be felt for a long time to come. We cannot forget here that one of the objectives of CAP is to strengthen the social and economic fabric of rural areas. If our small farmers are forced out, our rural communities will suffer.

When it comes to price recovery, are the Minister and the EU Commission expecting that the price of the produce they pick up at retailers, such as meat, dairy and grain, will remain unchanged? I can assure the Minister, if this is the expectation, it will further the crisis in rural Ireland.

Finally, can I get written answers, if the Minister has not time, to these two questions. When

it comes to the wording of the good agricultural and environmental conditions, GAEC, can the Minister give us some detail on how the derogation proposed in Article 4 of GAEC 2 complies with Article 2(1)(b) of the Paris Agreement, which calls for the greenhouse gas, GHG, emission reductions to be developed in a manner that does not threaten food production and can he update us on the discussions with the EU Commission on the working of GAEC 2?

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Lowry is sharing with Deputy Fitzpatrick.

Deputy Michael Lowry: The United Nations estimates that worldwide demand for food will increase by 60% by 2050. Experts estimate it will take as much innovation in agriculture in the next 40 years as in the preceding 10,000 years to meet the growing demand for food.

What is currently anticipated for Ireland is far from being innovative. When farmers from across the country are driven to stage a day of action through fear, worry and uncertainty about their futures, it is something we cannot and must not ignore. When the IFA president says that the combination of the current direction of CAP talks coupled with the Government's climate action Bill has the potential to shut down commercial farming in Ireland, not only must we not ignore it, we must stand up and fight against it.

We already know that only one third of farmers in Ireland are deemed viable at this time, largely due to having a second source of income. It is clear that the time has come to stand up and fight for Irish farmers. The Minister must battle with courage and determination on behalf of Irish farmers. When talks resume in Brussels, Deputy McConalogue must ensure that the outcome for Ireland is one that will copper-fasten sufficient supports for Irish farmers and not further erode their ability to survive.

Flexibility for member states, particularly for countries such as Ireland where the future of farming is of paramount importance to the economy, must be upheld and maintained. Supports for any sector in any country can never take a one-size-fits-all approach and this was never more true than in the case of the Common Agricultural Policy.

In my constituency of Tipperary, the value of agricultural exports is €1 billion. The farming community in Tipperary is a major driver of the local economy, as it is estimated that for every €4 a farm family earns, €3 goes back into the towns and villages in the county. This income derived from farming supports jobs in both the agricultural service sector and the commercial and business sectors. It keeps the wheels of commerce turning in rural Ireland. Reducing farm income would have a domino effect on towns and villages across the county and country. Rural Ireland is staggering on its feet and needs income support to recover.

I spoke to a number of the farmers who attended the day of action last Friday in Nenagh. The overwhelming feedback I got was of frustration and fearful anticipation about the future. A large number of farmers feel excluded from the decision-making process that determines their future. While they expressed full confidence in the IFA and the other farming bodies, which speak strongly on their behalf, they feel that their voices and opinions as individuals are lost and ignored. Farmers emphasise that they are as aware and committed to protecting and sustaining the planet for future generations as any other sector in society. They feel that there is an unfair public expectation that the major share of the solution will be shouldered by the agrifood sector. They worry that they will be victimised and scapegoated.

The circumstances and restrictions of the past 15 months have prevented farmers from gathering to discuss the impact of proposals that will determine their futures. We need to listen to

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the views of farmers across the country. That will give a true reflection of how farmers themselves are thinking and feeling as regards the crucial decisions being made in respect of their livelihoods. These are the people who work the land and will live with the consequences of any decision made in Brussels. These are the voices that need to be heard at this time. It is vital that the Minister carry the voices of these farmers with him to Brussels when he returns to the negotiations. He has our best wishes for his endeavours in that regard.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: I welcome the opportunity to take part in this important debate. The Louth and east Meath constituency that I represent has a strong rural and farming community. I have dealt with this community on many issues over the years. It is one of the most dedicated and hardest working sectors in the economy. In the north of the county, we have the Cooley Peninsula and Faughart regions, where there are farming families going back many generations. Further south and towards the middle of the county, we have many more farming communities that have dedicated their working lives to the land.

It is clear that farming faces many challenges. The prices farmers are getting for their produce are constantly under pressure, yet prices are not falling for the consumer. As we debate the CAP negotiations today, let us be clear - farming is the backbone of rural Ireland. In terms of numbers, the farming and food sector employs over 300,000 people throughout the country. In terms of exports, it contributed more than €13 billion in 2020. Put another way, the sector contributed more than €250 million in exports every single week of the year in 2020. This is a staggering figure. The employment figures show that, outside of the Dublin area, the farming and food sector provides almost 14% of total employment. That is more than one in ten people. When we look beyond direct employment, it is estimated that the output multiplier is 2.5 for the beef industry and 2.0 for the dairy and food processing sectors. This compares favourably with the rest of the economy, where foreign-owned firms have a multiplier of 1.2 while the rest of the economy has a multiplier of 1.4. It is clear that the farming and food industry is vital to the Irish economy, not only in terms of money, but also in terms of communities.

The Government must do more to stand up for the farming and food sector. I agree with the IFA's statement that the approach to CAP reform by the EU, along with the Government's climate action Bill, could shut down farming as we know it. That is not what we should be doing. Some farmers are being hit with substantial cuts under CAP. On top of this, we will see the Government's climate Bill resulting in considerable additional regulation and, as a result, significant cost increases in the farming sector. Ultimately, the end consumer will pay for these costs. I know from my dealings with the farming sector that it supports climate action. Farmers want to see carbon emissions reduced and a greener society, but how can they support this, which will involve significant capital expenditure, if they are going to receive less money? It simply does not add up.

The facts are there for all to see. Last year was the seventh year in a row that food prices declined. In the same period, the cost of producing top-quality, safe and sustainable Irish food produce increased. That is simply not sustainable. We are either going to support this sector or we are not. Words or vague commitments are not enough. Action and real support are needed. For example, there is a commitment by the Government to provide €1.5 billion from the carbon tax for agri-environment measures. Where is that commitment today? Is the money ring-fenced? When can the farming sector avail of this commitment?

I put on the record my full support for the farming and food sector. I acknowledge the great contribution that it makes to the economy. I also acknowledge the great farming communities

of north Louth, mid-Louth and the south of the county. It is clear that these communities need the Government to support them during the CAP negotiations.

I call on the Minister to commit fully to the Government's pledge to provide €1.5 billion to help the farming sector through agri-environment measures. Will he confirm that this money will be made available to the farming sector?

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: I know the tremendous value of agriculture to Deputy Lowry's constituency. He outlined it well in his contribution. I assure him that, in putting the next CAP together, we will consider all farm types and consult farmers in great detail to ensure that CAP is as farmer friendly as possible. I look forward to the Deputy's engagement in that. There will be a comprehensive consultation over the summer to which everyone, including Oireachtas Members, will be able to contribute.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Minister, but we must move on. Deputy Cahill is sharing time with Deputies Leddin and Flaherty.

Deputy Jackie Cahill: For 70 years, CAP has been a price support, guaranteeing top-quality food for European consumers at a low price. There has been a fundamental change in policy at European level, though, and CAP is moving towards becoming an environmental payment. This will have consequences for European consumers. Food price inflation has to follow if primary producers are to stay in business.

In the current round of CAP negotiations, three issues are still on the table for finalisation - the eco-schemes, convergence and front-loading. Regarding eco-schemes, a new environmental payment will form part of CAP. Whether it amounts to 20% or 25%, it will be significant for farmers. It is essential that there be no compliance cost. This is farmers' money and 100% of it must go into their pockets. Every farmer must be eligible for the payment. We cannot afford any leakage of the money.

The European Parliament is seeking 100% convergence and I understand that the Council of Ministers is seeking 85%. However one views the issue of convergence, there will be significant winners and losers, even within the same parish. Unfortunately, some people with small acreages could be significant losers whereas people with large acreages could be significant gainers. Through national measures, we must try to bring fairness to this on behalf of the people with small acreages who currently have high payments per hectare.

The Minister wants to bring the question on front-loading to the Oireachtas for a national decision. Front-loading would probably help people on low payments per hectare, but it would require a linear cut across all farmers' payments. Given all the changes that are happening, I do not know whether another linear cut on top of the cuts that are already coming due to the present round of CAP is feasible for farmers.

This round of CAP must cater for young farmers. As has been well highlighted in the media, the percentage of farmers under 35 years of age is at a level never before seen. Young farmers must be incentivised.

An issue that I raised with the Minister previously is that of the forgotten farmers. This round of CAP must do something to help those who, through no fault of their own, unfortunately lost out in previous rounds. We must look after them this time. It is probably our last opportunity to do so.

Deputy Brian Leddin: I will keep my points brief, as my time is limited. While the negotiators continue to work towards a consensus on CAP, it is worth highlighting that the current state of play is demonstrative of the divergences within and between the agricultural sector and policymakers. There is a misalignment between policies, funding mechanisms and the views of people who manage and work on farms.

On the one hand, we want to support smaller farmers and young people involved in farming, but on the other hand, CAP payments chiefly benefit larger and more industrial farms.

The EU has a plethora of policies on climate action and biodiversity protection, yet the proposals under the CAP do not put sufficient value on the preservation and protection of land.

4 o'clock Instead, they build on a legacy of intensive farming and land use illustrating blatant incoherence between the CAP as a fundamental policy instrument and environmental protection. As a result, EU countries are connecting the dots between the increase in intensified farming with the decline in farmland birds and insects. This misalignment could not have been better illustrated than in a report conducted by the European Court of Auditors last year on biodiversity on farmland. The report asked one overarching question, namely, whether the CAP contributed positively to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity. The short answer is “No”. Among its finding, the report highlighted gaps in the design of the EU biodiversity strategy and that most direct payments do not maintain or enhance farmland biodiversity. In fact, according to the scientists, voluntary coupled support may have a negative impact.

Most worryingly, the greening measures of the CAP have had little measurable effect, highlighting that greening has led to changes in farming practices on only about 5% of all EU farmland. This figure proves that we have a long way to go in improving the environmental protection of farmland, yet we hear from various stakeholders and member states that the greening measures of the CAP are too green. Something is awry here. Either there is a flaw in the design of the greening of the CAP or the endorsement of EU farmers is on paper only, with little or no follow through. Either way, it has led to discontent among farmers and environmentalists alike.

We are at a point in time when people are questioning, not only value of money when it comes to CAP payments, but also whether funds are appropriately used for both the equitable production of food and the preservation of our environment. In this House, we often talk about supporting the smaller farmer in ensuring the lifeblood of rural Ireland. The next CAP provides the opportunity to put those words into action. Let us ensure a more equitable distribution of funding throughout farms and reward the protection of our natural environment, instead of continuing to incentivise the intensification of land use and food production at the costs of water and air quality, biodiversity and our international climate commitments.

Deputy Joe Flaherty: We all agree that housing, health and the Covid challenge remain the big issues for this House. The twin issues of CAP and the climate action Bill are very much banging on the door at the moment. For the farmers of County Longford and, indeed, rural Ireland generally, we must get value and a meaningful dividend from these CAP negotiations. The IFA has been in the vanguard of pursuing the interests of farmers. Over recent months, the CAP negotiations and the climate action Bill have manifested as the two big issues for farmers.

Last week, I met many Longford farmers as they came into town to highlight their position and fears. There are real fears in farm households. There are real fears that this CAP

programme may be the death knell for one of our few remaining indigenous industries. CAP is about income and how we manage the environment. It is critical that any eco-schemes proposed will see in excess of 30% CAP Pillar 1 funding ring-fenced for environmental measures. As previous Members have said, it is important that no farmer is excluded from this and that none of the money for this pillar should seep out in terms of compliance measures either. Time and time again, we heard the word “convergence” used here today. I hope that the Minister, Deputy McConalogue, will champion 75% internal convergence in the negotiations.

Moving on to Pillar 2, we must commit to maximising national co-financing of these schemes. We must ensure these schemes are funded to the maximum level under CAP. While Fáilte Ireland and the hospitality sectors are at great pains to make much of our green image, that image was not painted overnight. Rather, it was down to the determination and commitment of generations of farm families throughout this country. For the midlands and Longford, it is critical that there is no restriction on normal farming activity on peatlands arising from the implementation of the good agricultural and environmental conditions compliance. The genuine farmer must be put front and centre in these negotiations. We must see the phasing out of long-term leasing of entitlements. Farmers who have built up and are working their entitlements should not be penalised.

This debate is joined at the hip with the climate action Bill. As a party, Fianna Fáil made much of the commitment in the programme for Government to allocate €1.5 billion, over the next ten years, to a new agri-environmental scheme. This must be in addition to CAP Pillar 2. It has been noted that we are already falling behind in this commitment, one year into the Government’s term. These are worrying times for farmers and farm families. As a Government, we must stand shoulder to shoulder with the farming community that has built this great nation.

Deputy Charlie McConalogue: Deputy Flaherty touched on a number of issues which we have touched on before and outlined the position from his county’s perspective. He touched on a number of issues such as convergence, for example, and the importance of a well-funded CAP overall and ensuring the impact on farmers and their financial sustainability is central to how we frame the next CAP. I take on board the points he made.

Something that I have said throughout this debate is the importance of involving farmers in how we put together our national CAP plan. Whether it be Longford or Donegal, Kerry or Meath, farmers throughout the country of all sizes from all sectors should be consulted and engaged with on the various decisions that are still to be made. It is important those decisions are made at national level and that we have significant control over them because farm families should be central to decisions that are important to farm family incomes. While that will be a challenging consultation, debate and engagement, it is important that it happens. It is important for the legitimacy of the CAP and the buy-in of farmers and farm families. It is important for the acceptance of whatever Common Agricultural Policy emerges towards the end of this year. As a member state, we will be obliged to submit the various measures and decisions contained in the national CAP plan to the European Commission for approval by the end of this year. The objective is to develop the schemes next year and to have them ready to go and to benefit farm families and the agriculture sector from January 2023.

I thank Deputy Flaherty for his contribution today and for his ongoing engagement with me on a number of agricultural issues on behalf of his farming constituents.

Deputy Michael Collins: I have been involved with farming organisations while a farmer.

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I once said to a politician that if one does not wear a pair of wellingtons, one does not know what farming is about. Being involved in CAP negotiations through farm organisations down through the years, I always wanted to make sure that the family farm was sustainable. It has not been sustainable, and it is not sustainable because of previous CAP agreements. If this does not change, will we be in the same situation where some farmers receive €250,000 to €300,000?

I know the Department stated recently in an agriculture and marine committee meeting that one must accept that this will not make a big difference if it is distributed, but that is the whole point. The mindset is that some farmers can make between €250,000 and €300,000 or more. Some 40% of farmers, as the Minister knows, are receiving between €1,500 to €5,000. It is an insane situation that some receive between €250,000 to €300,00 while 40% of Irish farmers receive between €1,500 to €5,000. That is why family farms are no longer sustainable. I am pleading with the Minister to ensure that this changes. There must be a cap on payments of between €60,000 and €80,000, but there is no point on putting a cap on them if one turns around and gives the payments in some other way. The cap on payments should mean that this is as much as a big farmer can get. The ordinary farmer should be brought up. In the situation of the farmers receiving €1,500 to €5,000, €6,000 or €8,000, that amount should be brought up €15,000 to €20,000. Those rates have not moved in 20 years.

There is much talk in this House about eco-farming. I would say that many Members have not worn a pair a wellingtons in their bloody life. There is an organic scheme out there that has not budged. We had a two-hour debate on the agriculture committee. The Chairman, Deputy Cahill, fair play to him, brought about that debate yesterday. It has not moved for decades. Farmers have not benefited on an organics scheme. The Green Party that is in government now, and was before, has done absolutely nothing. Stop talking about eco-schemes. We have a scheme already, just make it better, more interesting and profitable for farmers to get involved in. Some of them are losing money by being in it. Most are excluded from the application process. Our young farmers need to be looked after and a retirement scheme must be considered. There has to be a fair grant scheme for the ordinary small farmer. The new CAP cannot be for the extraordinary farmer, it has to be for the ordinary farmer.

Deputy Carol Nolan: There is massive anger and frustration among farmers. They genuinely feel that their concerns are not being listened to. The IFA is in Dublin today with members from all around the country, and many other organisations such as the Irish Cattle & Sheep Farmers Association, ICOSA, and the Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association, ICMSA, have been sounding the alarm on these issues and concerns. I listened to this debate for at least 45 minutes and heard many rural Deputies speak about the importance of protecting family farms going forward. I sincerely hope that those Deputies will put those sentiments into action and vote against the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021, which is a huge threat to our family farms, later tonight. Let them take that action and stand up for their constituents.

I come from the rural constituency of Laois-Offaly, where farming is a central component of our local economy. We do not want our local economy crippled because of the Green Party's outlandish ideological wishful thinking. That party is on a different planet. I cannot believe that Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil are supporting this lunacy. The Green Party obviously has a wish list but it must be reined in. What is being proposed could destroy the concept of the family farm. I support a CAP that is fair and that supports all sectors of agriculture. It cannot leave any sector behind. We know how important every sector is to our economy, both locally and nationally. There is huge frustration among people and farming families. They are being thrown to

the wolves. Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil need to stand up here tonight and support them. I hope those Deputies who voiced those lovely sentiments earlier will put them into action and vote against the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I apologies on behalf of Deputies Michael and Healy-Rae, who are currently attending their uncle's funeral on Zoom. Our sympathies go out to their family.

I was in Cahir last week to meet the IFA farmers. It was a beautiful day and a beautiful turnout, with a huge crowd in the square in Cahir. The farmers got huge applause and a great welcome from the customers, shoppers, shopkeepers, shop owners and everyone else. Ní neart go cur le chéile. That is what it is all about. Farming is so important. We are all only one step away from it. I declare that I am a hill farmer and have a sheep farm that I have leased to my son. I want to be honest about that. I have a direct question for the Minister and I want an answer in writing. Some €1.5 billion is ring-fenced under CAP for schemes. The Minister, on the Government's behalf, can provide up to 57% co-funding on that. Is he going to do that? Some payments have fallen behind already. The farmers have been blamed for being laggards but it is the Government that is the laggard and it is blackguarding farming.

I echo what Deputies Nolan and Michael Collins said about backbenchers coming in here and offering nice platitudes about supporting farming while telling us we are scaremongering. Some farming organisations also said we were scaremongering but they are here today and are now worried, when the horse has bolted. What is happening in the context of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill, which those Deputies are going to vote for tonight, is nothing short of an attack on rural Ireland and on farming families.

I wish the Minister well in his talks on convergence. I expect that it will come out around 75%. We can live with that and be happy with it but these are Mickey Mouse schemes. REPS was a decent scheme and then GLAS came in but what is in place now is folly. By the time farmers pay an adviser to submit the scheme and everything else they get nothing out of it. It must be profitable for the farmer to get out of bed and do his or her work. They put their shoulders to the wheel and fed us as a nation right through the years. They are the people who brought us out of three recessions. We are praising them now and they will be well if they are left alone but there is too much regulation and red tape. Above all, the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications, Deputy Eamon Ryan, is hovering over them like Petticoat Loose in Bay Lough, vulturing down on top of them with his mad ideas.

Farmers do an awful lot in respect of climate change. They accept that and understand it but they cannot be made scapegoats and that is what is going to happen tonight. It is dastardly that our group was only given six minutes to debate the CAP reform proposals. Giving that kind of time to rural Ireland is an indictment of the Minister and the Government. Farming is the most important industry we have and we are going to have four hours tonight to ram through a Bill to try to kill it off altogether. It is shameful and if Deputies from Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and some Independents come in tonight and vote for that they should hang their heads in shame.

Deputy Marian Harkin: My first point is about convergence. It makes no sense that current payments are linked to production levels that obtained in 2000. That is illogical and unfair. There was a change in the previous CAP with 30% of Pillar 1 for greening. However, we pursued a deeply unfair policy whereby two farmers in the same county might be taking exactly the same actions under greening and one farmer could be paid €60 or €100 more per hectare. That is wrong. It impacted negatively in the Minister's constituency of Donegal, as well as in Sligo,

Leitrim, Roscommon and elsewhere. Under the previous CAP, Ireland did the minimum on convergence and yet farmers were sold a pup, especially those in the west. They were assured that the Government would make it up to them in Pillar 2. I knew that would not happen and, unfortunately, it did not. REPS was eviscerated and those farmers who lost out on convergence in Pillar 1 lost out on Pillar 2 payments as well.

While the CAP budget is set by the EU, the Minister does control certain things. Will he commit to the highest level of co-funding for rural development? Will he also commit to substantial amounts from the €1 billion Brexit adjustment fund to support beef production and sheep production, especially in the Border areas that have been hardest hit? The Minister still has the opportunity to look at voluntary coupling. That is a tool that could be used to manage redistribution for medium-sized farmers on low acreage. I supported that in the context of the previous CAP but Ireland did not take that opportunity. Farmers want to be paid a decent price for what they produce but we do not have significant regulation for the primary producer in the food supply chain.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: The Minister might get someone to reply to these questions in writing because we do not have enough time. It is scandalous that we only have a few minutes to speak on an agricultural debate when others did not bother their arses turning up at all. The previous Taoiseach, Deputy Varadkar, stated that Ireland would top up these losses. Will we top up the CAP payment to make sure the budget is there? What are we going to provide in the carbon tax budget? The Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications has talked about what is going to happen with that budget but it does not seem to be coming so far this year. In fairness, every Deputy has spoken about the good agricultural and environmental condition, GAEC, standards, which the hill farmers brought to our attention. We need the wording that is agreed in Europe on wetlands.

What will the maximum single farm payment be? I am a firm believer that €50,000 is enough, which is €1,000 a week, and it should be divided out among the smaller farmers. Will the Government front-load things? Everyone is talking about the smaller person losing money with high entitlements and a smaller amount of land. That is how to solve front-loading. REPS will probably come under Pillar 2. I am hearing that if the farmers who are on that scheme at the moment opt out, nobody new will be brought in. The budget, which is supposed to come from the carbon budget, will not be used. I am also hearing from people on the ground in different counties, as well as the different planners, that there are 30 different flowers included in that scheme. There are probably special names for every one of them, but from what I am hearing there are not many of them in most of the places the Department is looking for them. That will be a major problem because given the money they get from it, a lot of farmers will not even bother going into the scheme because they do not have X, Y and Z.

I do not need an answer from the Minister's Department on the climate Bill. If the Deputies from rural Ireland vote the climate Bill through this evening, the people of rural Ireland will be rattling at our doors, just as the people from Donegal and Mayo stood up yesterday. They will not tolerate what is going on and what is following the green agenda.

Deputy Michael McNamara: What exactly is the Minister going to deliver? Many promises were made before the last election, as there usually are. This was an unusual situation in that the promises continued on into the programme for Government. The Irish Farmers Association, IFA, has been particularly unimpressed by the results-based environmental agri pilot, REAP, scheme. I looked at it and I was a little bit staggered by the extent to which there is

a certain maximum amount which can be drawn down. It is very low. Is it being suggested, therefore, that big farmers should not bother with environmental protection? The difficulty now is that a certain cohort of farmers opt out of the single farm payment completely because it ties their hands regarding what they can do with cross-compliance etc.

On the other hand, it is obviously an incentive for the majority of farmers to obtain the single farm payment. Equally, however, a large cohort of farmers would like to do what Deputy Leddin suggested and ensure their farming is done in a more environmental and sustainable way. More incentives were in place ten years ago, though, with the rural environment protection scheme, REPS, than there are now. There were also fewer ceilings in place in that scheme. How can the ceilings in the REAP scheme be justified, when contrasted with the lack of such ceilings in respect of the single farm payment? It simply does not make sense. I refer to incentivising farmers for every acre they farm.

We must also not forget that many farmers are farming large areas of marginal land. The whole idea of the single farm payment is that it compensates people for farming in a particular way and respecting the environment. However, it is even more difficult to farm marginal land sustainably and profitably than it is to farm 100 acres of land down the road from here and much closer to Dublin than where I or the Minister live. I think we both accept that point. Why, therefore, are we capping the number of acres for which payment is allowed to be received for adhering to the highest environmental standards in the world? Most people accept that it is important now that environmental standards be adhered to. However, that endeavour must be incentivised in some manner. What does the Minister intend to do in that regard?

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I thank everyone for their contributions. It has been a very constructive debate. I look forward to more of these discussions as the new CAP evolves and then, hopefully, if we get agreement at the end of this month, as we put together our national CAP plan from that point onwards. The CAP ensures that our farmers can continue to farm, that we produce the highest quality food and that we have a balanced regional economy. I refer to money coming into a farmyard staying in the locality.

In the early hours of this morning, I returned from discussions in Lisbon with my European colleagues. We discussed how we can best deliver a CAP that will work for all farmers in Ireland, one we can shape ourselves and that we will not have dictated to us.

Other Ministers share my concerns regarding the overly prescriptive approach prescribed by the European Parliament. This is a critical point to which I referred earlier. The European Council is approaching the talks to achieve a CAP deal with a desire that we feel the European Parliament, unfortunately, has not shown. The final negotiations under the Portuguese Presidency will take place at the end of June in Luxembourg. We must reach an agreement which allows us flexibility in many of the key areas. I want to be able to develop, as I have outlined in several responses to questions, a CAP national strategic plan that best suits Ireland and Irish farmers and their families.

The CAP is expected to achieve a lot, but it cannot do everything. Everyone has a role to play. We need all elements of the industry to play their parts and, fundamentally, the market must recognise and reward positive change. Farmers embracing new standards in animal welfare or environmental actions need support and not just from the CAP. Fundamentally, these changes must be led by the market and supported. Industry must make the choice to support

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farmers who strive for higher standards and consumers must decide to reward that effort by choosing to pay for it. The CAP budget will do a lot, but we need a market response to ensure success. Many Deputies are concerned that farmers are being asked to do more, but many environmentally-friendly practices can also support more cost-effective approaches by farmers. This has been demonstrated by programmes run by the farm organisations themselves.

My focus in introducing eco schemes will be to ensure that they are straightforward to understand and simple but effective to implement. Farmers must understand what they are being asked to do and why. I hope all farmers will see the value of participating in these schemes. The numbers of farmers applying for the new REAP scheme demonstrates farmers' willingness to engage and their genuine interest in environmental matters. Farmers understand the importance of sustainability. They receive their farms from the previous generation and hold them in trust for the next. Farmers do not need a lecture, but they do want clarity and my aim is for them to have this and to be fully consulted throughout this process.

The original proposals for the CAP budget included significant funding cuts. In the teeth of strenuous opposition, Ireland succeeded in reversing those serious proposed cuts to the EU budget for the CAP. The result of those negotiations is that funding for Ireland from 2021-2027 will be €10.74 billion, in current prices. This is an increase, compared to the original allocation of €10.68 billion for the current period. However, we must acknowledge that increased environmental and climate ambition across all policy areas was a key factor in getting agreement on the overall EU budget. This has been a strong demand of citizens across Europe and it is central to the new European Green Deal.

While there will be a certain element of change, our farmers need not fear this as they are already pioneers in this regard. Nationally, we will also have to consider the issue of Exchequer funding to provide the co-financing required to draw down EU funding. I assure the House that I will not be found wanting in seeking the necessary funding to support these objectives. Regarding enhanced baseline conditionality, this is part of the enhanced standards for the environment in the next CAP. This is a process which is familiar to most farmers and we already have in place well-understood systems regarding inspections. Again, I emphasise that the Council position supports member states in having national flexibility with regard to the definition of the national standard. There are some new standards, such as the new good agricultural and environmental condition, GAEC 2, for the protection of wetland and peatland.

I have already spoken at length on this issue to the House and I have always been clear about my stance on GAEC 2. I want to bring in a national standard that provides for appropriate farming activities to continue on this land. It has always been the view of the Council that farming, in a suitably environmentally friendly way, can take place on these lands. I listened carefully to the fears expressed regarding the implications of GAEC 2 and I raised this issue directly when the Council last met in May to seek to ensure that the final language regarding GAEC 2 is very clear on this point. My colleagues agree with this and it is my view that the final language on GAEC 2 will now be very clear on this point. As the son of a farmer from GAEC 2 lands, I know how rich these soils are and how they can work for the benefit of farm families.

Regarding the social dimension, I want to be clear that I fully support the proper implementation of full employment legislation. As less than 10% of Irish farms employ labour, this is unlikely to be a significant issue for Ireland. However, I have concerns about how this issue, which is very different from traditional conditionality, can be incorporated, as it is currently being considered, within the CAP. I will continue to highlight these complexities as we aim to

reach the conclusion of the CAP in the next couple of weeks. Our national CAP strategic plan will include full consideration of the issue of support for young farmers. The challenge of generational renewal exists across the entire European Union and the issue of what level of funding will be allocated is still being considered as part of the negotiation process.

Currently, a series of measures are in place to support young farmers. The national reserve and the young farmers scheme provide financial support to young farmers during the crucial early years when they are setting up. Under the targeted agricultural modernisation scheme, TAMS II, young farmer capital investment scheme, young farmers can avail of a 60% grant rate, in contrast to the standard rate of 40%. Support is also available for collaborative farming to cover legal costs incurred.

Ireland has invested significantly at national level through several significant taxation measures which are available to young farmers. These initiatives include agricultural relief from capital acquisitions tax, CAT; retirement relief from capital gains tax, CGT; stamp duty exemptions on transfers of land; a €25,000 tax credit under the succession farm partnership scheme; long-term leasing income tax relief; and 100% stock relief on income tax for certain young trained farmers. In total, €228 million is provided annually across the various national tax reliefs. I certainly consider that this demonstrates strong support for young farmers.

Much has been said about redistribution and the need to support family farms. I agree that we need to support them. I have made my views on the capping of large payments very clear and have succeeded at the Council negotiations in obtaining greater national flexibility in this regard. Indeed, it is my stance and the stance of this Government which has led the way in terms of capping. We must recognise that our farm structure is much more balanced than many other member states. The 80-20 rule relating to farm payment distribution simply does not apply in Ireland. We only have a small number of very large farms. Even farms involving company structures are often owned by parents with one child farming full-time. Equally, just because someone works part-time or even full-time off the farm does not mean that they are not farmers. They still farm, contribute to their local communities and provide important public goods. The reality is that Irish family farms come in all shapes and sizes. The entitlements system, in place over many years, is complex. All redistribution proposals have the most impact on those farmers who have entitlement values above the average. There are farmers with high value entitlements who do not have overall farm payments above the average but, equally, there are farmers with low or average value entitlements who have overall payments that are much larger than the average.

Again, I thank all Deputies for their contributions. I look forward to further engagement as the process at national level evolves and, hopefully, as we get an agreement at European level that is satisfactory.

Sitting suspended at 4.32 p.m. and resumed at 5.32 p.m

Estimates for Public Services 2021: Message from Select Committee

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Select Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands has completed its consideration of the following further

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Revised Estimate for Public Services for the year ending 31 December 2021: Vote 42.

Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021: Report and Final Stages

Deputy Mattie McGrath: My group and I want to call a vote on the taking of these Stages of the Bill.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy will have to wait. We will deal with amendment No. 1 and I will go the Members who have tabled the amendment in the first instance.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I object to the taking of this debate now, not the amendment. I want to call a vote against the House considering this huge Bill for only three and a half hours.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Mattie McGrath is seeking not to have a discussion on the Bill.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Yes.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I understand that it was agreed on the Order of Business yesterday that this is the business with which we are to deal now. Amendment No. 1 has been tabled by three Deputies and I am obliged to take their contributions first and then anybody else who puts his or her hand up can contribute.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: On a point of order and in support of Deputy Mattie McGrath, I believe that what is happening here is fundamentally wrong because there is not enough time being allowed to discuss all the amendments that are before us.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I am reluctant to interrupt the Deputy but that is not a point of order. The point has been made by Deputy Mattie McGrath and it is not in keeping with what was agreed on the Order of Business. I am obliged to follow the Order of Business. I am going to take amendment No. 1. Members can make contributions on it after it has been moved.

Amendments Nos. 1, 3 and 19 to 23, inclusive, are related and will be discussed together. Amendments Nos. 20 to 23, inclusive, are physical alternatives to No. 19.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: My amendment, No. 3, is the second one and it is very similar to No. 1. I wonder if I could come in after the first three Sinn Féin Deputies?

Deputy Darren O'Rourke: I move amendment No. 1:

In page 5, line 8, to delete "the transition" and substitute "a just transition".

I am disappointed to see reflected in the Bill that the Government has taken nothing on board from the 12 hours of Committee Stage scrutiny we had on this Bill last week. Some 231 amendments from Opposition politicians were put forward and not only did the Minister refuse to accept any of them, he also failed to bring forward any of his own based on what was said at the lengthy Committee Stage hearings. We highlighted a plethora of areas that need to be addressed in this Bill and Sinn Féin brought forward amendments in a number of these areas,

including on: the definition of a just transition and climate justice; the process of appointments to the Climate Change Advisory Council; the investor-state dispute mechanisms and their potential impact on climate action, such as the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, CETA; addressing the anomaly of the Government not being considered a relevant body; fracking; the need for impact assessments for specific areas; and democratic oversight of climate action plans.

Some of those amendments were ruled out of order and none of them was accepted. That is a very disappointing approach that undermines the cross-party approach that should have been taken to such major legislation, which will set out a framework for the next 30 years. We have resubmitted a number of amendments on Report Stage and I urge the Minister to improve the aspects of the Bill that we have identified.

One major area of concern is around the just transition aspect of the Bill, or the lack thereof, and that concern is reflected in amendment No. 1. We absolutely recognise the urgent need to combat climate change but we also want to ensure that decisions taken now and into the future do not disproportionately affect those who can least afford it. Although this Bill will not detail the policy decisions to be taken, it will outline the considerations that must be taken into account when proposing specific actions. We want to make sure the decisions taken to meet the ambitious targets contained in this Bill are progressive and fair, and have local communities at their core. Our amendments, specifically those dealing with just transition and climate justice, seek to achieve that. It is vital that this principle is enshrined in the legislation. This is where successive Governments have failed time and again. They have left people behind. Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and the Green Party have opted all too comfortably for punitive measures which hurt the most vulnerable in our society. As a result, for the vast majority of ordinary families, climate action is associated with cost. The climate Bill must not be blind to the concerns of local communities. If we are to successfully move away from our reliance on fossil fuels, reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and transition to a carbon neutral economy, we need a plan that brings communities with us, not one that penalises them or forgets about them altogether.

Sinn Féin's amendments Nos. 1, 22 and 23 all refer to the need for the inclusion of a definition of a just transition and just transition principles. Amendment No. 1 is self-explanatory and would include just transition in the Title of the Bill. Its inclusion would highlight the need, from the outset, for decisions stemming from this Bill to be grounded in the principle of fairness.

Amendment No. 22 seeks to insert a definition of just transition into the Bill. Despite its huge importance, the term "just transition" is referenced just once in this Bill but has no definition, which undermines that single reference. Fairness and mitigating the impact climate action decisions could have on vulnerable groups and sectors should be a central pillar of this Bill but instead it appears as a token gesture. This amendment seeks to define "just transition" as "the bringing together of workers, communities, employers and government in social dialogue to drive the concrete plans, policies and investments needed for a fast and fair transformation to a low carbon economy and to ensure that employment and jobs in the new economy are as decent and as well-paid as those left behind". As I told the Minister on Committee Stage, he will be familiar with this particular definition of just transition because it is taken from his own Just Transition (Worker and Community Environmental Rights) Bill 2018, so I hope he will not vote against something in which he clearly believes.

Amendment No. 23 again refers to the just transition aspect of this Bill. As mentioned, we are concerned that the just transition aspect of this Bill is far too weak and poorly defined, so

we want to see this area strengthened. This amendment would see the inclusion of a definition of just transition principles, taken from the Scottish Act, and these principles are referenced in two of our other amendments, which seek to ensure these principles are taken into account in the preparation of the climate action plan and the long-term climate action strategy. This amendment states:

‘just transition principles’ means the importance of taking action to reduce net emissions of greenhouse gases in a way which—

(a) supports environmentally and socially sustainable jobs,

(b) supports low-carbon investment and infrastructure,

(c) develops and maintains social consensus through engagement with workers, trade unions, communities, non-governmental organisations, representatives of the interests of business and industry and such other persons as the Ministers consider appropriate,

(d) creates decent, fair, and high-value work in a way which does not negatively affect the current workforce and overall economy,

(e) contributes to resource efficient and sustainable economic approaches which help to address inequality and poverty.

Our later amendments Nos. 52 and 57 are related and again seek to strengthen the definition of just transition in this Bill. There is opportunity in this and, as I said at the time, there was a clear theme to the amendments that came forward on Committee Stage. That theme has now continued on Report Stage. The Minister hears loud and clear what Opposition voices are saying in this regard. My party is committed to recognising the reality of climate change and the urgency to act on it. However, the path we choose to take to get there is equally important. I urge the Minister to listen to the clear soundings from the Opposition and communities.

Deputy Réada Cronin: I am proud of the input Sinn Féin had in tabling amendments to this Bill. The essence of our amendments are about what “just transition” should mean. I am bitterly disappointed with the just transition aspect of the Bill and I assured my constituents in north Kildare that we would do everything we could to define it. This Bill is the easy part. I have no doubt that it will pass but it is important that we get the just transition and climate justice parts of it right. The Irish people are sensible about this. Everybody knows we are in the middle of climate change and I believe if there is fairness in this Bill, people will be prepared to put their shoulders to the wheel and make sure we do what we can to save our climate.

Many experts have appeared before the Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action. Scotland has got it right. It had a whole section on the principles of just transition. A Government could stand over those principles and be held accountable for achieving them. What we need here is not just tinkering around the edges. We need a complete transformation of how we think and act in this country. We need the support of the people and without justice at the centre of this Bill, we will not get that support. Whatever roaring and shouting will go on here tonight will be nothing like the roaring and shouting that will go on over the next few years. We cannot have that. The Minister should accept the Sinn Féin amendments and ensure that a fair and just transition and climate justice are parts of this Bill. Those elements should be put front and centre, as my colleague, Deputy O’Rourke, has said. By accepting amendment No. 1, people would know exactly what the intent of this Bill is.

No previous generation has faced what we are facing. Our 21st century society must be one in which communities have a say. They should see themselves as a part of the solution and as a part of nature, not separate from it. Just transition is not only about energy and carbon budgets. It is equally about ethics. I hope the Minister will accept some of the amendments. This was the reason the Green Party went into government. It is a considerable improvement on the Bill that the climate committee received just before Christmas. Plenty of experts came before the committee and told us it was for the regulation zone. I hope the Minister is not going to take the attitude he took on Committee Stage by saying he will not accept any amendments. I hope he will accept some of our amendments. Climate change is going to transform our lives. Covid-19 was merely a dress rehearsal for what is ahead of us. I urge the Minister to accept these amendments.

Deputy Matt Carthy: This legislation is a litmus test for the Government, particularly for the Green Party in government. I often wonder if the Minister accepts at all the critiques that are made of his approach to climate. Representatives of all parties, across all political parties, have reiterated that point. Many people see climate action as meaning very little other than additional charges on them and their families, forcing people to pay for things for which there is no alternative. The Minister's utterances in the past have simply added to the sense, which I believe he recognises, that the Green Party in particular is out of touch. He made references to vegetable or salad boxes on windows in the midst of a global pandemic or having two cars running in a village and all those types of utterances in the past.

This was the Minister's opportunity. Tonight's debate is his opportunity to show that he has been listening, and for Government to show it understands that the overwhelming view of the Irish people, in my opinion, is that this country absolutely needs to and can play a positive, constructive role with regard to climate action. There is also an obligation on all of us to ensure that those who pay for that climate action are the people who caused the climate crisis in the first place. The irony of all the moves we are making in terms of transition and providing alternatives is that the very people who became billionaires in creating a climate crisis are the ones who are best placed to actually capitalise on the measures we are talking about. That is unless governments put in place the types of protections that will be underlined to support those families, workers, communities and farmers who are at the coalface of the deliverance of what is in place.

This amendment sets out broadly Sinn Féin's prioritisation of ensuring that climate justice involves a human-centred approach to climate action which safeguards the rights of the most vulnerable and shares the burdens and benefits of climate action across anybody. The amendment defines just transition as meaning the bringing together of workers, communities, employers and governments in social dialogue to drive the plans, policies and investments that are needed for a fast and fair transformation to a low-carbon economy. It sets out, in clear terms, that we are not going to be hypocrites and say, on one hand, that we will put in place all these measures with regard to Irish emissions while, on the other hand, supporting trade deals at a European and global level, such as the Mercosur trade deal, the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, CETA, and all the trade deals which are coming down the line and which do the exact opposite of all that.

Crucially, the Minister will know that we put forward a number of amendments which set out clearly that this House understand the concerns of our farming communities. We asked for and put forward amendments that were unfortunately ruled out of order. We put it to the Minister that he should insert those amendments because doing so would ensure that any action

carried taken by the Government would lead to assessment of the social, economic, financial and rural impact of any decisions that are made in order that we can ensure that carbon budgets are set on the basis of fairness. We asked the Minister to ensure that the reviews of carbon budgets to be carried out will include such assessments. We also asked that if negative impacts were identified, the Minister and the Climate Change Advisory Council would be responsible for outlining how the Government would mitigate against them.

Very importantly, we brought forward amendments that would address carbon leakage by ensuring that we would not ban practices in Ireland that would lead to increases in imports from the other side of the world. In other words, we are not going to reduce the level of beef production in Ireland if the net result would be the importation, at the expense of the rainforests, of a far inferior product from a country on the other side of the world.

We brought forward a proposal which would ensure that any decisions in respect of livestock would be based on sustainability and that if we are ever to get to the point where we must reduce livestock numbers, we will start with the feedlots rather than the suckler farmers who have been targeted, time and again. By means of our amendments, we put forward proposals which would ensure that the work farmers do through carbon sequestration is recognised in a clear and transparent manner.

Up until now, the Minister has refused to accept any of our amendments or bring forward any of his own in order to address those very real concerns. I must ask why that is the case. The very fact that he has refused to do it has increased the suspicion, particularly in our rural and farming communities, that he is not actually serious about a just transition at all. He is actually just serious about getting the sound bites and the eventual big banner headline to the effect that he has pushed this Bill through the Dáil when, in reality, it means nothing. Its worthless because he has not outlined the framework of how we can do it in a fair and sustainable way.

I will ask the Minister again. More importantly, I will ask his colleagues in Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. Will they stand up for fairness, as they have been uttering in corridors and whispering in communities all across this State? Will they stand up for workers and rural communities by accepting the amendments that have been put before the House today? It is a big question because we know it is very difficult for a Minister to get up and say that he or she did not deal with an issue adequately on Committee Stage. I am, however, asking the Minister to do that so we can ensure that we have the greatest possible buy-in for climate action across this country. Everybody wants to play their part but not everybody should be expected to pay what could be a very heavy price. It is up to the Minister. It is time to articulate very clearly whether he is on the side of just transition or on the side of plain rhetoric.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: As the Minister knows, I have worked in the environmental sector for 20 years. Some 15 years ago, I worked in New South Wales in the Greenhouse Office and had these sorts of discussions. To be honest, in my first year as a Teachta Dála in Ireland, when I realised that dealing with, debating and trying to make the climate Bill stronger would be one of my first actions, I was relieved. This is a discussion we should have had many years ago in Ireland and we need to take these actions urgently. We need to ensure that we pass on to future generations a much stronger Ireland than we are now. I was, therefore, really looking forward to standing here today and saying “Well done” for the work the Minister has put in, and that this Bill is as strong, ambitious and future-proofed as we need it to be. Unfortunately, I am not in a position to do that at this point. That is hugely disappointing.

As recently as earlier today, the Minister spoke about how this is a collaborative Bill. I acknowledge that in some regards the Minister has taken advice on board, particularly with regard to the National Oil Reserves Agency, NORA, amendments. For the most part, however, this has not been a collaborative Bill. There has been a major rush to get it through the Dáil. There was a rush on the committee to not engage in pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill. The committee pushed back at that. We had pre-legislative scrutiny and it gave rise to a very worthwhile discussion.

We put forward a huge number of amendments, which the Government claimed it took on board. A review of those amendments shows that it did take them on board. In some respects, it may have taken them on board in part and taken a very veneered and light-touch approach to the suggestions and recommendations of the Joint Committee on Climate Action. Then we had the Committee Stage debate last week. A total of 231 amendments were put forward by the Opposition. Unfortunately, pretty much at the start of that debate, the Minister indicated that he would not be taking any of them on board.

This needs to be a flagship Bill for the country and not just for the Green Party. The Green Party and the Government need to listen to other people's voices in the context of this Bill because they do not have all the answers when it comes to the environment. They need to listen to others. I really wish that the Minister had listened to the recommendations that were put to him by means of those Committee Stage amendments.

As a previous speaker indicated, there is a theme running through this. I never thought we would see the Opposition trying to encourage and support the Green Party and the Government to make an environmental Bill stronger and they are turning down that encouragement and support. I did not think we would see that.

One of the key gaps in this Bill relates to just transition. All the Opposition Deputies raised this as an issue. It is really disappointing that the Minister has not grasped the opportunity and made the Bill stronger when it comes to how we will meet our targets. We all agree that those targets must be met. We need to do so. What we need in that Bill, however, is some direction as to how we will meet them and who we will prioritise, support and look after.

My fear at this stage is that, as per what is normal and has traditionally happened in this country, the Government will support the corporations and big players, and individuals will be left carrying the can. However, individuals cannot do that in this instance. They cannot make up for all the emissions produced by the big players. One of the issues I raised on Committee Stage last week was that we are debating how we can set the structure in place to meet emissions targets while, at the same time, data centres are getting approvals for emissions of the same volume as those produced by County Kilkenny. How is that possible and how is it allowed to go on unhindered, with no policy direction or discussion?

There is a free-for-all happening while we are talking about how different communities are going to have to roll back on their emissions. We cannot allow this type of unfairness in the system. That is why the just transition aspect, including a definition and principles, is incredibly important to include in the Bill. The Minister said last week it is too difficult to include such provisions in legislation and it is not possible or feasible to do so. In fact, it has been done in Scotland and New Zealand and I do not see why we cannot do the same. We must not have a Bill that leaves generations, communities or workers behind. We need a very broad approach

and there are huge opportunities in this country if we do it right. We must make sure we put our communities at the forefront of how we achieve our emissions targets.

When I spoke on this issue last week, the Minister said it would require separate and specific legislation to include the provisions I was proposing. When will that happen? It could take years for something like that to get through. In the meantime, the climate actions are being rolled out. A just transition must not be a reactive transition. It has to be planned and we must take a very deliberate look at the needs of each of our communities, regions and industries. We must identify what the barriers and risks are and then identify the policy drivers we can use to support communities and sectors. That is absolutely possible and feasible to do. I guarantee that if we do this properly, we will leave Ireland a much stronger country, with much stronger communities that are environmentally sound.

If the Minister does not take that approach, he risks dividing the country and setting people against each other, including farmers, people who drive cars or use other forms of transport and people in the energy sector. The provisions in this Bill must not leave us with a divided country as a result. I ask that the Minister look at the just transition principles and consider what kind of legacy he wants from this legislation. I acknowledge that he has put huge effort into it and his entire career has been working towards this point in time. I am asking that he make the provisions as strong as they possibly can be. We will work with him to do that.

Deputy Bríd Smith: I want to speak to amendment No. 19, which my colleagues and I in People Before Profit proposed. The first question to consider is what we are seeking to amend. The answer is that we want to amend the Government's failure to provide a definition of just transition. There is only one mention of it in the entire Bill, even though it is one of the fundamental issues that needs to be dealt with in these provisions. That reference is in section 4(8) of the 2015 Act, as inserted by section 6 of the Bill, as follows:

(k) the requirement for a just transition to a climate neutral economy which endeavours, in so far as is practicable, to-

(i) maximise employment opportunities, and

(ii) support persons and communities that may be negatively affected by the transition;

There is nothing in the Bill to force a just transition legally or make this Bill something to celebrate this evening. I am sure the Minister and his party will celebrate because they see it as a world-historic provision.

In reality, it is a missed opportunity. If the Minister were to talk to Bord na Móna workers or the aviation workers who have been laid off or will be laid off in future as we try to curtail our aviation activity, he would not find them jumping with joy and glee over this Bill. For them, just transition does not mean a move to equitable, fair and good employment and no impact on their livelihoods and way of living as a consequence of climate emergency measures. In fact, the Bord na Móna workers I met, when they were being laid off a year or two years ago, were very disillusioned with the whole idea of climate emergency measures, as represented by what was being done to them. That is understandable because many of them, having been told there would be alternative jobs, are ending up in low-paid, minimum wage employment, with no pensions or trade union representation and no real security or decent future.

The just transition that is needed will involve making stark choices about the type of society in which we live. Naomi Klein puts this very well in her writings on what is required for a green new deal, as she calls it. She argues that we need a society and an economy that are caring and sharing, not a society that favours big business, industry and the drive for future expansion. That drive is represented best in this country by the astonishing expansion of data centres, the number of which increased by 25% in the past year. The energy regulator has warned about the huge amount of energy they use. We have had three near misses with the grid in recent times. By 2029, data centres will be absorbing 70% of all renewable energy and 30% of the entire energy on the grid. How can there be a just transition when that is happening and, at the same time, we are telling farmers they must cut back their herds and telling ordinary people their carbon taxes will increase year on year? There are many people who cannot afford to retrofit their homes.

If we continue on this path, we will create more climate sceptics. The weaknesses in this Bill will definitely feed into climate scepticism. We are seeking to amend it not because we are opposed to the need for climate emergency measures but in order to strengthen them. I know, however, that the Minister will reject our amendments. We have been offered weak provisions for just transition for communities, workers and individuals. We need to change entirely how our economy works and stop facilitating the expansion of large industries at the expense of ordinary people, small family farms and workers in this country. That is what climate justice and just transition are about. We have tried to define just transition in this amendment and that definition is worth considering. As I said, the Minister's failure to include just transition as central to the Bill will lead in the long run to a huge increase in the number of climate sceptics in this country. People will hurt as a result of these provisions. Instead of having a countryside littered with data centres and windmills to power them, we need a countryside that is ecologically safe and friendly and has more schools, properly planned towns and decent farms that can facilitate alternative types of food production. We need to ensure everybody is included and nobody is left behind.

Other speakers have noted that the recommendations from the Oireachtas committee, whose members worked very hard to change the Bill, have not been taken on board. The Minister will probably remark that he has taken on board many of our recommendations from the time he issued the first draft of the Bill. In fact, the first proposals he brought forward were so appallingly weak, it would have been impossible not to agree to change them. We want just transition to encompass a host of measures that will support and encourage communities, individuals, workers and society to move on to embracing proper climate change measures. Unfortunately, the Government has a flippant and dismissive attitude on this matter. Before coming to the House for this debate, I participated in a "Drivetime" discussion on data centres with the chairman of the climate committee, Deputy Leddin. The interviewer remarked that Deputy Leddin did not sound like a Green Party Deputy but, rather, like a member of one of the conservative parties because he favoured the immeasurable expansion of data centres over the need to focus what renewable energy we produce on powering hospitals, schools, industry and transport.

Renewable energy, whether offshore or onshore, is very important but it needs to be used in ways that benefit our society. It should contribute to a caring and sharing society that looks to develop work and how people live in a fair way that does not diminish their way of life but, in fact, enhances and improves it. That is how we will improve the environment and the world in which we live. It is how we will get buy-in to climate action rather than an increasing number of climate sceptics. I am afraid the Minister's Bill fails on this most central issue of just transi-

tion. All other things pale into insignificance beside it. This debate will trundle on and on but there is nothing here for workers, nothing here for communities. The Bill's weakness is not defining what a just transition is and it leaves a lot to be desired.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I am also speaking to amendment No. 19. If we do not have a just transition, it is very possible there will not be any transition that is effective in dealing with climate change. This is something I do not think the Government, or the Green Party, which should know this, fully comprehends. If we alienate ordinary working people from the climate change agenda which is so urgent, if we turn them against it because we do it unfairly then it will not happen, or there is a serious danger it will not happen.

When one looks at the alarming growth of the far right, which has many elements to its sick and rather twisted ideology, be it racism, anti-vaccination or conspiracy theories of one sort or another, one very serious component of the far right's rise is climate scepticism. While many of the ideologues of the far right are just dangerous nutjobs, it gains traction with ordinary people if they feel the measures being taken in the name of climate action are ones coming at their expense. It is hardly surprising that would be the case. To date, this Government, or the last one, or the Green Party based on its historical experience in Government, have not seemed to grasp that. It is simply not climate justice, or a just transition, to increase the cost of heating houses for working people who have no choice whatsoever over whether their houses are properly insulated or what type of heating system is in their houses. That is one example, and it applies to tens of thousands of renters in the private and public sector. They have absolutely no choice about the heating systems in their houses. They have no choice about whether their houses will be retrofitted. Yet year after year, they are going to be hit with an increased cost just to keep their houses warm. On the current trajectory the inequality will grow because not only will the poor be hit hardest by climate measures, but the rich will benefit. This is because if a person is cash-rich, he or she can retrofit his or her house tomorrow. That will drive down the energy bill and the person will pay less carbon tax. Thus the rich will benefit and working people will suffer. What is that going to do for popular enthusiasm for climate change? Not a lot.

The taxi industry is on its knees at the moment, as I have pointed out to the Minister repeatedly. We get vague promises about a package of support which is frankly paltry and almost insulting, in that it is not real support. All the taxi drivers believe the Minister's failure to support them is driven by a Green dislike of the taxi industry, a determination to destroy the taxi industry and the fact that insofar as he is interested in electrifying what might be left of the taxi fleet, it will be only for the big companies which can afford the cost of electric vehicles. This is because the grant of €20,000 the Minister is offering is simply not enough for the majority of taxi drivers, who are sole traders. Maybe the big companies can do it but the individual taxi driver cannot make up the €30,000 gap. Thus, if the Minister puts them in a position where they must replace their cars, which they will have to do now at the end of this year, it will be a major investment. How are those drivers going to make up the €30,000 gap when they have already lost two years of income? It would be a huge gap in any event, even if they had not lost income due to the pandemic. That is fuelling scepticism against the environmental agenda and against the Minister specifically. Whether it is justified or not, that is the feeling out there. It is alienating people from the climate agenda and the Minister needs to address it as a matter of urgency.

It is a similar situation with public transport. If the Government wants to address the climate crisis it must improve the public transport that is available for people. The change in the use of public transport in my area because of the investment put into the DART was transformative. Previously we had a bockety old diesel suburban railway train which frankly, was

unpleasant for people to get on. Consequently, many people did not use it and got in their cars. Then there was investment in the DART and it really changed things. One could say the same about people on the Luas. However, what if someone is not lucky enough to live beside the DART or beside the Luas? What of the people living in a rural area where investment in public transport is being cut back? What if, due to the privatisation agenda the Government is facilitating inside Dublin Bus, many of the public service routes that are off the central routes but which serve the older population trying to get to the hospital or whatever are lost? What will the people affected think then of the climate agenda? They will see it as something that is adversely affecting them. I could go on through the examples but I have not got time. There are also the fishermen in Dublin Bay affected by the determination to put offshore wind on the sensitive fishing areas. The turbines are to go on the banks rather than further out, as is common practice in most of the European Union, because it is too expensive for the corporations which want to make money but it would be the right thing to do for the local communities, fisherman and ultimately for biodiversity and the environment.

The Minister must hardwire the just transition into the brains of the Government and into this legislation. He has not done that. We are trying to do that with this amendment and the Minister should accept it for that reason.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The final speaker of the named Deputies is Deputy Paul Murphy. I will then move on to the list of Teachtaí Dála who put their hands up.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I thank the Leas-Cheann Comhairle. I did not think she would get around to me so quickly. I am very happy to be named on the amendment. I have two points to make. The first is that it is scandalous that the Government is putting a guillotine on this, the most important - or what should be the most important - piece of legislation we will pass in this Dáil. We are not getting sufficient time to debate the issues because the Government, and the Green Party in particular, do not want to deal with the inadequacies of the climate action Bill. I was listening to the debate earlier and another Member made the point that we all want to see the targets and so on but the very fundamental point is that the Government's own targets, set out in the Bill, do not match with the science. They are less than even the EU targets, which also do not match the science. As such, we are not doing what the science demands here and we are going to be in a worse position as a consequence of it.

The main point I want to make is about the just transition, which is obviously effectively missing from the Bill, in that there is an absence of a decent definition and so on. There is a very good parallel between the treatment of workers in the airline industry due to Covid measures and the needs with respect to a just transition and moving away from a fossil fuel-based economy. It is remarkable that any time there is criticism about the way airline workers are being treated, the Government turns around to the Opposition and says we are responsible. It says the people in Opposition who were the ones calling for mandatory hotel quarantine, that we are the ones who have shuttered the airline industry and that of course we are responsible. There does not seem to be any kind of acceptance, or even logical acknowledgement, that one can be both for necessary public health measures, including mandatory hotel quarantine to deal with Covid, and simultaneously say that workers should not pay the price for that. We say workers should not pay the price for doing what we need to do in terms of Covid, public health, etc. Those two positions are absolutely compatible but then there is a question of who should pay for that. We are clear that the big polluting companies should pay.

The Government's response to the airline crisis gives us real cause for concern with regard

to what approach it will take with climate matters. In a similar way, certain industries will disappear completely and others will be wound down. To be blunt, in a future zero-carbon society in Ireland, we will have extremely few or no internal flights. We should instead invest in a proper high-speed rail network so people can get around the country.

That is not a call for any airline workers to lose their jobs, wages, pension benefits or working conditions. That is the point of a just transition. A just transition means that those workers whose jobs become less or whose jobs will no longer exist as a result of a zero-carbon economy that we absolutely need - there are no jobs on a dead planet - should not pay the price. That can be done completely. We are talking about the creation of hundreds of thousands of green jobs that must happen in our economy. We can have retraining for people and an absolute guarantee for people that no jobs or income would be lost.

The manner in which the Government approached the question of aviation and the impact of Covid-19 gives every indication that it will not follow this path. Instead, with Bord na Móna or other groups of workers affected by doing what is necessary with climate change, the Government will turn to the Opposition and say we are calling for climate action and, unfortunately, that is why people are losing jobs. We do not accept that and such behaviour is just giving a gift to the reactionaries in this Dáil and around the country, some of whom deny climate change and will attempt to argue that climate action will destroy people's lives and therefore people should oppose that climate action.

The exact opposite approach is needed, encapsulated in the notion of an eco-socialist green new deal that would transform people's lives for the better at the same time as rapidly moving to a zero-carbon economy. It is not just that this can be done; if we are to successfully and rapidly move at the scale and speed with which we need to move, this must be done. Without mobilising people behind the demand to build zero-carbon housing on a massive scale, providing free and quality public transport for all, a four-day week without loss of pay, sustainable agriculture and demands that will transform their lives for the better, we will not be able to overcome the opposition. That opposition comprises very substantial and vested interests in fossil fuel companies, car companies and all the rest, including the aviation industry and big agricultural companies. All of these will simply refuse to do what is necessary.

This is not some highfalutin debate about how to define a just transition. It is about getting to the centre of whether we will be able to do what the science demands, which requires the kind of programme that transforms people's lives for the better.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I really do not know where to start on this, although I will speak to the amendment. I was glad to have given something like seven hours last Wednesday to Committee Stage of this Bill, when we went through each of these amendments one by one. I was truly shocked and terribly disappointed by the Minister's statement that he does not care what amendments are brought forward, by whom or from what party or non-party, as it makes no real difference.

The Minister is saying to the Irish people tonight that it is the green way or no way. It is Eamon Ryan's way or nobody's way. The Minister wants this to be more like a dictatorship than anything else and that is wrong. He should act as a democrat and parliamentarian who takes on board other people's points of view and respects them. I, for one, have listened continuously to what the Minister and the Green Party want. I have seen how the Minister used his party's political muscle over Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, ensuring that because of the way seats

fell in the last election it sees its opportunity. It is like a wasp, which does not care if it dies once it gets a final sting. The Minister does not care what happens in future to the Green Party; all he wants is to be able to say the party put in place a system that cannot be changed by future Governments or Ministers for Finance.

It is the same as the way he did away with Bord na Móna. The Minister left Dublin one day and went to the midlands so proud of himself for shutting down Bord na Móna. Bord na Móna was a great organisation and it built houses for its workers over the years. Families were reared on the backs of that great Bord na Móna organisation. The Minister was so ecstatic with himself when he announced the shutting down of Bord na Móna on one of the few occasions he has left Dublin in recent months.

I do not know how he could have that on his political CV. I do not know how he can be proud of the fact that today moss peat is coming into the North of Ireland for distribution around the country because we have stopped harvesting our own peat. How can he be proud of the fact we are no longer producing bales of briquettes here? Do not tell me we can still buy them.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I remind the Deputy, gently, that we should speak to the amendments.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: Yes. I am talking about just transition. I ask the Minister, very clearly, where is the justness and fairness in this process. I have heard him say we will create green jobs instead of brown jobs but that is probably the biggest load of balderdash and nonsense. How can the Minister seriously sit there and think the Irish people will take this on board and let it wash? It is wrong.

The Minister speaks about rewetting the great bogs of Allen, where people worked or slaved, staying in tents in encampments, working day and night to drain them. With one swoop of the Green Party biro, the Minister has consigned them to being rewetted. That act is a sin. I have heard the Minister talking about holding carbon in the ground but how can he ask us to take that suggestion seriously when we are still importing these goods from overseas for sale here without a problem? At the same time, the Minister wants to gently get to the stage where he will stop farmers and other individuals from having the right to cut turf.

The Minister is not yet strong enough to do it. He has Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael where he wants them because he can keep them in power so long as he stays in his position. He will be able to railroad his way through the Irish people. The Green Party has a minute mandate, although I respect it very much. It is a very small mandate when compared with the enormity of the Minister's actions. The number of people who gave the Minister and his Green Party colleagues a number one vote is small, although I respect everybody who voted for the party. It is democracy at work. We can consider the influence of the Minister in the Government. How can he stand over his actions and sleep at night? I do not know.

The Minister is being very cocky in not accepting any of the amendments. He would not even listen to the debate on them. These amendments will be gone through one by one. We will go through the Bill line by line. I am very proud of my colleagues in the Rural Independent Group under Deputy Mattie McGrath who have worked diligently on this like everybody else who tabled amendments. I am only speaking about our group and what we are trying to do.

We are standing up for farmers, fishermen and people in the rural countryside. The Minister spoke about timelines and I asked a question about it. I am very conscious that I am speaking

to the amendment because it is about transition and how we go from here to there. It is about the fairness of it. I cannot understand how the Minister can stand over some of the measures being proposed, even in the period to 2030, including the suggestion that slurry spreading and such farming practices be carried out by 100% renewable resources, in other words, an electric tractor. I have information for the Minister. We do not yet have such a thing in Ireland and we do not yet have a battery operated tractor in Europe that would be powerful enough to pull 2,000 or 3,000 gallons of slurry out of a yard and spread it outside in a field. I must inform the Minister that there is no such thing.

Where is the fairness or the just transition in this? Does the Minister realise that in the last months Ireland has come dangerously close to-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I thank Deputy Healy-Rae. I am afraid I must inform him his time is up.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I did not realise a time limit applied.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Yes, it is seven minutes.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I will make one final point. Ireland nearly ran out of electricity. Does the Minister know that? Where is the common sense in telling everybody we must use more and more electricity when we are already at the stage of nearly running out of it?

Deputy Holly Cairns: A just transition is vital to climate action. Without an assurance of social justice, workers' rights and commitments to address poverty, any environmental measures run the risk of furthering social and economic inequalities. The amendments in Deputy Whitmore's name, and similar amendments that include a stronger and more nuanced definition of just transition, should be enthusiastically supported by the Government. I cannot think of any reason someone would oppose a clearer definition of a fair transition in the legislation, not to mind a Bill being championed by the Green Party.

Social and environmental justice must go hand in hand. There must be substantial societal and economic transformation if we are to have any chance of playing our part in addressing the climate and biodiversity crisis. These transformations present considerable challenges and opportunities. It is essential that the State commit to shielding and supporting communities from the potential upheaval caused during the transition.

Sectors and communities that depend on fossil fuels will need support to move to more sustainable sources in their homes, farms, businesses and transport. People want to be more sustainable but they need help in making those necessary changes. We need progressive measures to support low-income households and rural areas. A carbon tax is a necessary tool to reduce emissions but it will only work if there are alternatives in place.

Poor and non-existent public transport in rural areas and a lack of active travel infrastructure mean that people have no choice but to use cars. It does not matter how expensive petrol or diesel is, people will still need cars. Without alternatives, carbon taxes are merely punitive and help to build up resentment and anti-climate science rhetoric.

We need schemes that support workers in moving to new types of employment centred on low carbon. We need carbon taxes to proactively fund the retrofitting of homes, not just reimburse those who can afford it. We must pay upfront for retrofitting, whether people own their

homes or are in social housing. We need to reinstate funding for the development of recycling centres and expand their number so that there is at least one civic amenity centre close to the population it is meant to serve. These centres should be free for recyclable materials.

In agriculture, we need far more ambitious schemes that foster sustainable practices. We need to move away from an intensive farming model that demands farmers produce more and more for less and less, all the time eroding the quality of the land. Farms need support in doing this. Policies pursued by many Governments for years have pushed for a more intensive model, and farmers are still losing out. We need to flip that around. Farmers need to be incentivised to protect the landscape upon which the future of the industry depends. These incentives could range from the carbon sequestration capacity of so-called marginal land to rewarding forestry planting and biodiversity enhancement.

Earlier today, I highlighted the limits placed on the results-based environment agri pilot programme, REAP, scheme. It excluded more farmers than it supported and did not recognise the value of gorse and heather areas. We need these schemes to be ambitious and innovative.

There is a constant and false narrative around farming and climate change. A lot of that comes from this House. Politicians vigorously defending farmers insinuate that they have personally done something wrong. Nothing could be further from the truth. I do not know any farmer who actually goes about his or her everyday business in an attempt to release as many emissions as possible or to destroy as much biodiversity as possible. Government policy directly incentivised how we farm. For example, a Department official comes out to my farm every year and docks us money from the area aid payment wherever we do not have livestock on the land. The perception that farmers desperately want to stock more and more livestock units to the hectare is frankly ridiculous. I have never met anybody who goes about their day-to-day business trying to stock more and more cattle per hectare and import more and more feed from the other side of the world.

Government politicians making statements that climate action will decimate Irish farms blatantly pits farmers against science and environmentalists. A very sad result of this narrative is that the communities that would be most affected by climate change are the ones that are most scared of climate action.

We welcome climate action legislation but it is disappointing that such a ridiculously short period of time was left for Deputies to submit amendments. It is more disappointing that an even more ridiculous and shorter period of time was provided for debating those amendments. Clearly, we will not get to most of them. The near absence of a fair transition in the legislation is beyond disappointing. I implore the Government to reconsider and ensure a clear definition of a just and fair transition is added to the Bill.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I am glad to get the opportunity to speak on this Bill and rebut some of the things that have been said by Deputy Cairns. It was very unfair of her to say she did not know any farmer who was doing his best not to do harm to the land he was working. That is totally and absolutely untrue.

Deputy Holly Cairns: I am sorry, Deputy, but that is not what I said.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I did not interrupt you.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputies should speak through the Chair.

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Deputy Holly Cairns: Yes, but I did not misquote you.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I did not interrupt you.

Deputy Holly Cairns: I am sorry, Deputy, but I said I did not know a single farmer who gets up in the morning and goes about his or her day-to-day business trying to damage biodiversity.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: Deputy Cairns is running down my time now.

Deputy Holly Cairns: Deputy Healy-Rae misquoted me completely.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I heard what the Deputy said. She is wrong. A whole lot of farmers-----

Deputy Holly Cairns: In fairness, a Leas-Cheann Comhairle, that is literally the opposite of what I said.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Whatever Deputy Healy-Rae heard, he heard but it is not what Deputy Cairns said.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: She certainly did say it.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: It is not what she said.

Deputy Holly Cairns: I said the complete opposite of that, literally.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I am glad to get the opportunity to speak-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: The Deputy's time is running down. In fairness to Deputy Cairns, she did not make that comment but I will leave it up to Deputy Healy-Rae to decide whether he will withdraw his remark.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: He is giving out to the-----.

Deputy Holly Cairns: He has to withdraw that statement.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Healy-Rae, the clock is-----

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: Deputy Sherlock should go down to Ballyhoura Cross and do something about the road over to Kildorrery. He attacked me in my absence on another day.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: The Deputy should be a gentleman and acknowledge that he misquoted Deputy Cairns.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Sherlock is out of order.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: Acknowledge that now.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: The Deputy is well out of order.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Danny Healy-Rae has five minutes. Just to be fair to the previous speaker-----

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: The Minister, Deputy Eamon Ryan-----

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Just a minute, please. Deputy Cairns did not say that. I listened carefully. I will leave it up to yourself-----

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: If the Leas-Cheann Comhairle is saying she did not say it, I will take her word on it and take that back.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Thank you.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I will take your word for it, not Deputy Sherlock's. He attacked me when I was not inside here. He should do something about the road from Ballyhoura Cross into Kildorrery where lorries cannot park or turn right without driving up on the ditches.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: It was Deputy Cairns you misquoted. You should take it back, address it to the Deputy and be a gentleman about it.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Deputy Sherlock, please.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I said that if the Leas-Cheann Comhairle said I was wrong, I am wrong and I am sorry.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy. Please continue.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: The Minister, Deputy Eamon Ryan, does not have a monopoly on the environment. Farmers have adapted a lot of new and valuable methods, be it for spreading slurry, storing slurry, spreading under the nitrates directive or spreading less fertiliser. They have been doing their best at a great cost. They were told to increase their herds by the then Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy Coveney, seven or eight years ago. Now they are being told they must reduce their herd by 51%. That is not fair or right.

It must be remembered that climate change can occur for many reasons. One reason is that the sun comes closer to the earth at different times when they rotate. This has happened several times and it creates an increase in climate change. We are now told data centres will use 30% of our electricity by 2027 or 2028. There was no just transition when Bord na Móna was closed down. I cannot see how anyone could be proud of this. It was supported by the other Government parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. To think they allowed Bord na Móna to be closed down. At the present time, in case the Minister does not know, timber is being drawn from south Kerry to Roscommon to keep some power plant there going because it cannot get turf. If we did not keep that power plant going, some parts of the country or many parts of it would be without electricity.

I support alternative energy and many people do. However, the wind is not reliable and we cannot ensure continuity of power from the wind when it does not blow, nor can we store the wind when we have too much of it. We have to be fair and the Bill is not fair. Farmers are being given no chance to measure the carbon they are sequestering. It is said it will take seven years but, at the same time, the Minister is putting this pressure on them and it is very unfair.

Rural Ireland is doing all the harm and there is no word about urban Dublin. The Minister was proud that he was getting a carbon tax to put new buses on the road. Where are they? They are in Dublin. If we look out the gate of the Dáil any day, and I was there for a few minutes the other day, several big double-deck buses pass with one or two people in them. They are passing each other up and they are passing each other down. There are three or four of them behind each other. Why does the Minister not suggest pedestrianising Dublin to take some of

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the pressure out of the city? If we are speaking about carbon, this is where the carbon is. It is not on the top of Moll's Gap. It is not in Ballinskelligs or in The Pocket in Glenmore or below in the Black Valley. I can tell the Minister there are no fumes there.

Dublin has public transport and we do not have it. People cannot move around without cars or vehicles. We need lorries to bring produce into our county from places such as Dublin. We need transport but the Minister will charge us carbon tax. At the same time, most of the carbon is being created in Dublin. The Minister does not mind this because it is his constituency and he does not give one damn about rural Ireland, rural Kerry or anywhere else. People come from all over the world to see the greenery in Kerry. We have more greenery in Kerry than any part of Dublin city. People come to see it but we are not getting credit for it.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I call Deputy Michael Collins and ask him for his co-operation.

Deputy Michael Collins: People also come to west Cork to see the beautiful greenery, as the Minister does, but he has forgotten this when it comes to the Bill. The Bill is a complete attack on rural Ireland. I want to speak on the amendments. To think that 239 amendments were tabled, 75 of which were tabled by the Rural Independent Group, and the Minister is going to reject every one of them. Does he think we do not care? Does he think we did not meet climate action groups in west Cork who advised me on the right way to roll out a good climate action Bill? I have brought it forward to the Dáil and the Minister has rejected every one of our amendments.

I cannot speak on behalf of Sinn Féin and other groups and they will speak on their own amendments. Perhaps the Minister will change his mind because he still has a chance to do so. Perhaps he will decide not to railroad through the Bill and will sit down with the groups and parties and disagree with some but agree with more. They come from the heart of our constituencies and communities. This is what we represent. It is a scandalous shame today. Deputies who tabled amendments to the Bill and vote for it this evening should go back to their constituencies and speak to the people who elected them. They will never be forgotten or forgiven for what they have done. There is no point in us representing our constituents and the people who come from our areas. Decent hard-working people brought forward amendments to us to make sure we made the Bill even better but the Minister idly sits here and says "No" to every one of them.

Every one of the Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael backbenchers, whether a Deputy or Senator, is patting the Minister on the back. What kind of a deal did they do a year ago to get the Green Party across the line? The Bill is an appalling attack on rural Ireland and I advise everyone who tabled an amendment to vote against it this evening and let the blame be with the backbenchers for what they have done. We will hold them to account on every one of these amendments in the years to come. I assure the Minister I certainly will do so.

I want to speak about the amendments on just transition. The Bill is being railroaded. We are paying a high price for having the Green Party in government. The Minister has a dream that there should be two cars in every village. I live every day in rural Ireland. I know this cannot work and will never work. It is a dream the Minister wants to achieve and he does not care how it is done. He will look for support for a carbon tax and he will hit the ordinary mother and father going to work every morning and young people trying to take their children to school. The Minister will hit them in the pocket and keep hitting them in rural Ireland so we

can insulate Dublin. We can look after the Minister's constituents. It is a rich idea and great idea for the Minister.

Imagine the people looking to warm their homes in a warmer home scheme for two years. We have tabled an amendment to break this down to at least two months but the Minister refused to accept it. Imagine a situation where people are paying 23% VAT on insulation for warmer home products. We want it reduced to 0%. Why did the Minister not bring forward a proposal to reduce it to 5% or 6%? Some people could afford to buy insulation products to insulate their homes and try to meet the targets the Minister is telling us we must meet but that amendment is of no use because it would help the ordinary people of rural Ireland to meet the terms.

I do not have much speaking time but I want to talk about agriculture. I have heard Deputies from Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil saying it has nothing at all to do with agriculture, not to worry and move on and say nothing. The former chair of the Climate Change Advisory Council, Professor John FitzGerald, has warned that the only way agriculture will meet these targets is through a dramatic reduction in livestock numbers. This is in black and white and not from me or the other members of the Rural Independent Group. The Minister would love to think this is what we would be saying but it is not. It is the former chair of the Climate Change Advisory Council.

The Climate Change Advisory Council previously called for the culling of 3.4 million cattle by 2030. Today, a Deputy said farm groups had their eyes off the ball and now they are running around dramatically but they had their eyes off the ball on this one. We must remember the farm organisations in New Zealand had their eyes off the ball when the Green Party there pulled a fast one and now it is calling for a 15% cull of cattle in New Zealand. The truth is being found out as this goes on. We will be here to follow through on how the Minister is treating people in this.

The Climate Change Advisory Council will be the new Dáil. Move the blame game away. It was the same with the Taoiseach earlier when I mentioned the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority, SFPA, and foreign vessels that are able to come into Ireland and do what they like. He told me he had no control over the SFPA. Of course he has no control because that is the game the Government is playing. The Minister will have no control over the Climate Change Advisory Council unless he has a few buddies on it. Why will there not be an independent climate scientist on it? Is there a public policy expert on it? Is there a rural transport public policy expert on it? Will there be representatives from farm organisations? Will there be an agricultural policy expert? Will there be a climate change economist and climate change financial analyst, and a representative to represent the interests of social justice? Will there be representatives from rural communities? The answer is "No", because the Minister has his mind made up. It will lead to the destruction of rural Ireland. I certainly will not support any part of this.

As I said when I met the climate action people in west Cork - fine decent people with whom I had many good meetings - I would support this if support for our amendments was forthcoming. I do not even know whether the Minister had read them properly. To be quite honest, it is scandalous that good parties and groups in here put forward 239 amendments and the Minister finds it in his way, and gets support from two political parties that are supporting people of rural Ireland, to refuse each one of those amendments.

We have had three or four amber alerts this year. I have a funny feeling behind the scenes the Minister is quite happy. The Minister is trying to send a message and his message is clear.

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It is clear that the people of rural Ireland will suffer and the Minister will be held to account for every detail of this if he has a political future in here.

Deputy Carol Nolan: I wish to speak to amendment No. 19 on the just transition.

I come from a county that is bearing the brunt of a just transition. The Minister felt the need to only mention “transition” once in a 7,000-word document. As that is a huge insult to the people of the midlands, I suggest the Minister go back and revise this.

It is shameful that the Minister has rejected amendments from all the Opposition, which put forward constructive amendments, reached out and tried to be collaborative. It is appalling. It reeks of elitism, the fact that the Minister does not care and the real arrogance of the Government. Let me remind people that the Green Party would not be doing what it is doing without the full support of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. It is shameful.

I was in this Chamber with my colleagues in the Rural Independent Group last year and we pleaded with the Minister of State, Senator Hackett, to accept amendments to the Forestry (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2020. She refused to accept those amendments. As a result, we have chaos continuing in the forestry sector. Does the Minister think that is fair to counties such as Laois and Offaly, where we depend on employment in forestry and in Bord na Móna?

The former leader, the great Taoiseach Seán Lemass, must be turning in his grave to witness what is going on here tonight and the way the Government is selling out the country, selling out the people and walking on the ordinary rural people of this country. Let me tell the Minister this will not be forgotten and that will be for the wrong reasons. It will not be for a good reason. This will never be forgotten.

I urge the Minister to try to be constructive because it is shameful. I have dealt with hundreds of workers. I have dealt with horticultural workers, peat-harvesting workers and workers in Bord na Móna and what the Minister is doing is disgraceful. These are workers with bills and mortgages and the fact that the Minister cannot even provide alternatives is disgraceful.

The Minister should be standing up and explaining to the people of the midlands how importing briquettes and peat makes sense. When one looks at the carbon footprint created by the transportation of German briquettes or peat into this country, is the Minister for real? What planet is he on? The Minister is not on planet Earth; that is for sure. We can see that. Any practical reasonable person with an ounce of common sense would see that the Minister is not in the real world, and more shame that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael could allow this to happen to the people of rural Ireland.

The Minister is destroying the midlands. Not a single job has been created. The Minister had no alternatives. The Minister would not even define what a “transition” meant and it is only mentioned once in a 7,000-word document. What does that say to the people of the midlands?

What does the fact that we have the so-called just transition commissioner being moved to another, second role to sort out pay disputes on a Government expert group say to the people of the midlands? It is truly an insult.

This will go down in history for the wrong reasons. I urge Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil Deputies to cop on to themselves and serve the people who elected them, namely, the people from rural Ireland, such as the people from my constituency of Laois-Offaly, who put their faith in

them and went to the polling booth to vote them in. I ask them to stand up for those people, because this is serious.

It is serious also that the Minister is happy to have a dictatorship called the climate advisory committee put in place. He is willing to legislate away the ability of Dáil Éireann to have any say in what happens in the future. It is disgraceful. The Minister is imposing this on the people. He is not bringing people with him. He is leaving communities behind.

I remind the Minister that no jobs have been created in the midlands. Offaly will bear 53% of the brunt of the job losses and the Minister thinks that is fair. Seriously, I do not know what planet the Minister is on but it certainly, as I said, is not planet Earth. The Minister needs to get real here. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael need to call a halt to this because it is ruining communities and good counties, such as Laois and Offaly, where people have worked hard in traditional employment and where people have made sure that there was work, there were jobs and they supported the local economy. What the Minister is trying to do is cripple the local economy and that is coming across clearly. We get that message clearly where the Bill states, in the proposed new section 6A(9), that “The Advisory Council shall— ... in so far as practicable, ... maximise employment”. Is this for real? I thought it was a joke, when I read it, that the Minister is not prepared to prioritise employment and that Fianna Fáil is prepared to let him away with putting something like that into a Bill. I mentioned Seán Lemass, a great man who got semi-State companies up and running. There is no way this should be happening in the absence of alternatives. The Minister will plunge lower-income families into poverty. There will be fuel poverty. There are no alternatives. We are seeing German briquettes in our shops in Offaly. What the Minister has done really makes no sense.

In fact, the Minister has put off many people who were climate activists and who were active on the environment. They have gone the other way, in disgust and in disillusionment. I know that for a fact because I am in contact with many young people who were active and enthusiastic about the climate change agenda. This makes no sense, as anyone with an ounce of cop-on would see. It is doomed to failure. It will go down in history for the wrong reasons, as will this sham of a Government propped up by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Deputies who come from rural Ireland. They should be ashamed of themselves.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I again remind Deputies we are speaking to the group of amendments beginning with amendment No. 1. While I realise that passions are high, if we could refrain from personal comments and stick to the issues, they are really important.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: The Minister, Deputy Eamon Ryan, is a decent man. Tháinig a sheanathair ó Thiobraid Árann - The Caravansary used to be a pub. The Minister has great roots in the country. Anything I say to him is nothing personal. It is merely fundamentally opposed to what is happening in this Bill.

This rushed legislation had very little pre-legislative scrutiny and a kind of a mad feverish element. One day last year in the Dáil, I think, a Thursday evening, many of us had gone home when the Dáil decided that we should have this climate Bill and all parties and none signed up to it. They were trying to beat one another as to who would be the strongest and who would be in the clique. This is the social media. This is media-driven as well and nobody is standing back to question it.

I thank the hardworking staff in my office, Mairéad McGrath and, indeed, Brian Ó Domh-

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naill, for doing such huge work on the amendments. It is very disappointing when Deputies Nolan, Michael Collins and Michael Healy-Rae attended the committee. Last week, we were berated for not attending but I will also say - I do not want to blame the secretariat - we were not even notified of the committee. We had a call from a journalist - Brian Ó Domhnaill did - to know why we were not there. We were not even notified of it. There is some clandestine kind of a secret incremental issue going on here - shut those lads up, get it off, get it passed, do not accept any of their amendments, leave it off, we have to do this and to hell with the consequences.

I am speaking to amendments Nos. 1 to 3, inclusive, and amendment No. 1 on specifying “a just transition”, because it is not a just transition. It is a most unjust imposition. That is what it is. The con of those words is really stretching the credibility of the Bill and the people who came up with these words, names and acronyms. It is not fair. It is not right. It is unfair to the English language. Today, we are celebrating one of our famous poets and authors here in Dublin. It is an unjust transition. It is an unjust imposition. Tell that to the people who Deputy Nolan represents on the bogs of Offaly.

EirGrid, the operator of the transmission system, announced amber alerts about the supply of electricity on the national grid on 11 September 2020, 6 January 2021 and 27 May 2021. We trust it with managing power. When I was on the communications committee back in 2007, 2008 or 2009 and the Minister was the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, we went out to EirGrid and we saw a fascinating project. I was amazed
7 o'clock by the sheer scale of it. The amber alerts should be a wake-up call for the Minister, who is trying to stop the power plants. Those were only three alerts. There was a brown alert in November. We have also had power cuts. I have received approximately ten phone calls in recent weeks. There was one last Sunday week about a power outage in the town of Cahir. There was no explanation or anything about it on the website. Highly expensive catering equipment was damaged because of the outage, which happened without warning. That can happen. For example, there can be accidents and swans often hit the lines and so on, as happened in my village, but this was more serious. When will we take the wool from our eyes, open them up and see?

I have a message for Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael’s backbenchers and the Independent Deputies who back the Government. If they vote this Bill through and then try to tell the people of Tipperary and everywhere else in the country that they did not realise what it was and they had to do it because it was in the programme for Government, it will not wash when people are in the dark and going around with candles and flashlights like the Peep o’ Day Boys to find something in their kitchens or elsewhere in their houses. We cannot get generators. Timber cannot be sold for houses. There is the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, SEAI. We had a Tipperary energy agency, something I was proud of, but it has been subsumed into a large conglomerate and taken away from local control. People must wait two or two and a half years when applying for a grant for insulation. One of our amendments would reduce the VAT rate on insulation. All of the policies that the Minister has passed, including the carbon tax, have driven the price of insulation upwards because it is oil based. They have driven the price of timber up by 100% and steel up by 60%, meaning that the cost of housing people has gone through the roof.

The issue of farmers has been mentioned. Farmers and farming organisations are being blamed and demonised. I like Deputy Cairns. I heard what she said and was pleased with it. No farmer gets up to do any damage to the environment. Farmers are the custodians of the environment. They have eked a living out of it. My ancestors did so, as did the Minister’s on

that humble farm at The Caravansary in Tipperary. If he looks at his shoes closely enough, he will see that they still have clay on them. He is a bit removed from Tipperary but I ask him to please feel the clay and the passion of the earth. Remember the Famine. We are going to create another famine because of food shortages and no light. We will be back living prehistoric lives if this nonsense happens.

Renewable heat fuels obligation, RHO, schemes allow industry to advance competitive decarbonisation solutions for heat sectors, supporting indigenous sources without burdening Exchequer funding. The Minister never considered these. In France, biomethane will be the most competitive solution, allowing manufacturing and export industries to address their main issues while providing new income for farmers, turning perceived emission and waste issues into an opportunity. Why do we not do this? Why is there a rush and indecent haste? Any legislation that is rushed will have flaws, and this legislation is deeply flawed.

Why does the Government not discuss the Bill with farming organisations? Many organisations have come to me and my group, the Rural Independent Group. Some did so very late in the day. The IFA came here today. It was probably a year late. I do not know whether it has bought into this, but it will have a realisation when there is no power for its farmers' milking machines. How will they have tractors and everything else? The IFA actually criticised us for scaremongering about the national herd but that came from Professor John FitzGerald and many other independent people who said that we could not achieve what we wanted to by 2030 without culling the herd. We saw the two lovely animals with the IFA today. Let the farmers live.

I appeal to the Minister to remove the guillotine from this Bill and give us time to debate it. Engage with people. He is driving the people who are interested in climate change and a just transition away from him. A spoon of honey is better than a bucket of vinegar. Will the Minister please get out the honey and try to bring people with him instead of forcing them? I am surprised. We have had a tyrannical 15 months with Covid and this is a further tyranny. The climate change Bill is the new red. Green is the new red. It is a form of communism. It wants people to be cold in their homes and workplaces. It is making people little and back into what they were in prehistoric times. It is shameful, it is downright stupid and it is not necessary.

Deputy Duncan Smith: There is no getting around it - this is landmark legislation. Temperatures are high and we are on Report Stage on the back of a Committee Stage that took place last week. We in opposition are disappointed with how the latter element went. In advance of Committee Stage and this debate, I looked back over my Second Stage speech. Knowing what was coming and that no further changes would be made, we could just have gone through Second and Committee Stages in late April and been two months closer to the carbon budgets and climate action plan, which are the real meat that we hope will help us reach our targets. This is framework legislation.

Last week's Committee Stage and the amendments now under discussion on a just transition have left a sour taste at the end of a process that started well. As I stated on Committee Stage, the Bill's pre-legislative scrutiny stage was a wonderful example of how our Parliament could work well and constructively. The Minister played a leading role in that and the Opposition in both Houses played a good role. It was very good work. Unfortunately, we cannot say the same of the past two weeks.

The real work that will have to be done is not included in the Bill. It will follow afterwards.

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The Bill is the framework, though, and it was an opportunity to include what we needed to in terms of the just transition so that the most vulnerable, those on the fringes, those experiencing poverty and those communities that are most at risk from the dramatic changes that we will have to make across all sectors of society are not left behind.

So far, some of the debate has pitted one sector or community against another, but our greenhouse gas emissions are spread across a number of sectors. It is not exactly an even spread, but it is even enough to show that we will all have to make significant changes. The Minister understands this. Agriculture is a large emitter of greenhouse gases. Transport is also a large emitter of greenhouse gases. I live in Dublin, one of the most congested cities in the world. Sometimes it is as high as third place on that list and has regularly been in the top 25 in recent years. I am ashamed of that. The congestion is not down to buses, but to cars. We need to make significant changes in Dublin, our major cities and our large towns to reduce emissions. That will require considerable lifestyle changes that may be uncomfortable for people. Energy consumption, including home energy consumption, is another large greenhouse gas emitter. This cuts across all communities, urban and rural.

We need supports to be in place if the transition is to be just. If the language in the Bill was stronger and had the amendments that were presented by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Community Law & Mediation and the Jesuits been included, we would have much more comfort about what was to come after the Bill and would be much more confident that people and communities, be they surrounded by buildings or fields, would be covered when measures were introduced through carbon budgets and climate action plans.

We are going into this feeling a bit uncomfortable and shaky because it is obvious to anyone in the House that, if 80 Green Party Deputies made up the Government side, the Bill would look different. We know that the Green Party's Government partners drew a guillotine down on the Bill after its pre-legislative scrutiny stage and said that they would go no further on the just transition or climate justice because doing so would not have suited them or their interests. As exhibited during the recent level 5 restrictions, they want to continue building data centres. I mentioned this on Second Stage and it was referenced today by Deputy Bríd Smith. Ireland is on track to have more than 100 data centres in four or five years' time. The energy consumption of such centres is off the charts. Nothing is comparable. We will scramble to produce renewable energy just to power these behemoths of energy consumption on the fringes of our cities and towns. They do not create many good jobs, unionised jobs or just jobs. They have a voracious appetite for water and this country has significant water security issues coming down the road. Everything falls under the umbrella of a just transition when we go into the detail of these issues. We will be back debating the nuts and bolts of this but we feel an opportunity has been lost to take a global lead, with countries like Scotland and New Zealand, in how we define a just transition and climate justice, and how we make them central to our policy and decision-making. Unfortunately, this has not been done. There is one reference to a just transition and it is far too weak. That is where we are coming from and that is why there is a sour taste in many of our mouths for the final Stages of this Bill.

There is more to come. We may need amending legislation following this. We hope that the Minister will engage constructively on that. He has not spoken yet, but I assume his stance is as it was at Committee Stage, in that no amendment will be taken. There could have been a 20-minute, a 20-hour or a two-week debate on this Stage. The fact of the matter is that nothing will change based on what was presented after Second Stage and we are where we are. The fight and the battle will move to the next part which is the climate action plan. It is a shame that

we are where we are on those elements, notwithstanding that there will be a significant shift after this Bill is passed, which cannot be lost in the heat of discussing the amendments that are not accepted.

Deputy Joan Collins: This Bill sets the stage for the future. The future is all those people who were out on the streets, the students in 2019, and all the NGOs that have been campaigning for a robust climate action Bill over recent years. We had hoped to get it from the Green Party but I am afraid that tonight, we did not get it in this Bill. The initial Bill was very weak. The committee did great work on the pre-legislative scrutiny, from which we have two pieces of wording. On climate justice, it is stated:

‘climate justice’ means the requirement that decisions and actions taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to adapt to the effects of climate change shall, in so far as it is practicable to do so, safeguard the rights of the most vulnerable persons and endeavour to share the burdens and benefits arising from climate change

The wording on “just transition” states:

the requirement for a just transition to a climate neutral economy which endeavours, in so far as is practicable, to—

- (i) maximise employment opportunities, and
- (ii) support persons and communities that may be negatively affected by the transition.

It is not good enough. The Minister mentioned that he could not put a stronger just transition definition into the Bill. However, we know that has been done in other jurisdictions in relation to a defined and clear just transition definition. That is what is required in this Bill. I appeal to the Minister, at this late stage, to do that, to sit down with other parties and to work out that just transition wording.

The justification for the Green Party entering the Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael Government was to ensure it got a robust climate action Bill, but I am afraid this Bill falls far short of what is required. Put simply, climate justice means that those individuals, corporations and states that contribute most to climate change must contribute most to its solution. Some of the world’s poorest people, who are affected by drought, flooding and the loss of land to desert, not at some time in the future but today, have contributed hardly anything to climate change. We have seen advertisements on TV about deserts and societies that had previously been able to sow seeds and cultivate their land. The land is desert now. This is happening now.

In 2015, Lucas Chancel and Thomas Piketty calculated that the top 10% of emitters worldwide contributed approximately 45% of global emissions annually, while the bottom 50% contributed approximately 13%. Accordingly, the first principle of climate justice is that the richest individuals and societies, those that contribute most to global warming, must pay to protect poorer individuals and societies from its negative effects and must also play the biggest part in halting and reversing those effects.

There have been points made about carbon taxes. Climate justice must also apply to carbon taxes. Carbon tax is one of the most commonly proposed means of lowering emissions but it is controversial because it is regressive, meaning that those with less wealth and income end up paying a greater proportion of their income and wealth than those with more. This is the situ-

ation with Ireland's current carbon tax regime, which involves a simple tax on fuel, oil, natural gas, kerosene, marked gas oil, liquid petroleum gas and solid fuels. The Bill should include progressivity in carbon taxes as a guiding principle of climate action. There is a need for all carbon taxes to be progressive, that is, for the proportion of an individual's income or wealth paid in tax to increase with increasing income and wealth and for the revenue from such taxes to be solely spent on measures to further climate justice, including a just transition.

The question of a just transition for those who could lose their jobs, such as those in Bord na Móna and the ESB, is a major weakness in the Bill. There must be strong income supports and retraining, alongside investment in sustainable green industry in the areas most affected. A just transition is best achieved through the solidarity economy, meaning through initiatives controlled and owned by local communities. For example, a body of research shows that a community is much more supportive of renewable energy production if it has a stake in it. The Western Development Commission has shown that community-owned energy initiatives have greater economic multiplier effects than externally-owned projects.

One of the final points I will make is that climate justice demands that the Bill sets much more ambitious goals. The global target for net greenhouse gas emissions is that they reach net zero by 2050. However, the living standards of the poorest people, who are least responsible for climate change, need to rise to acceptable levels. That means the poorest countries should be allowed to increase their emissions for some time after the richest nations. They should not be expected to reach net zero emissions until after 2050. To achieve the global goal, countries such as Ireland need to reach net zero emissions long before 2050.

I have been involved in #FixTheBill, which is an umbrella movement for a large group of NGOs and environmentalists that have sent an email to all Deputies on climate justice, a just transition, relevant bodies, accountability, and overall ambition. This group is not happy with this Bill and it wants to see a just transition and climate change strengthened to the point where they will have an impact on all communities, on agriculture, in rural and urban areas and in factories and workplaces all over the country. Unless we have a strong just transition definition in this Bill, the Minister will not bring those communities with him. This is a warning to him. He will not bring them with him. There is a need to involve the trade unions in this as well because they have called for a strong just transition based on the model in Scotland.

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú: I commend a number of the amendments that have been put forward by my colleagues, Deputies O'Rourke, Cronin and Carthy. I will speak in favour of amendment No. 1 and beyond, that is, to those amendments that relate specifically to the just transition. I echo many of the calls in this House. We accept there must be moves made in the direction of dealing with the climate problem. Even as a small State, we are part of a wider European Union, a wider globe and we need to deliver on that. There is an obvious necessity for accountability measures and to ensure we follow through on targets. It has been said by many, that there is a feeling out there when people hear about climate change and action being taken from a governmental point of view that it is about costs. They associate it with costs; costs for those who can least afford it, including those on the peripheral of society, those in rural Ireland and the farming community, in particular, who do not necessarily have many alternatives. Until we have alternatives in respect of fuel and so on, it will be very difficult for people not to see the likes of the carbon tax as an imposition and something that makes them poorer. Deputy O'Rourke and others spoke about their disappointment that we have not included just transition in this Bill. We are talking about a just transition that delivers for all those groups, including workers and their families. We must engage with all the necessary stakeholders, that

is, the employers and the workers, and such a transition must also deal with farmers. I have said this previously and I will repeat myself: there is an onus on the Government, the Minister and others who want to deliver this change, to engage with these stakeholders, particularly with those in the farming community. Many of them are incredibly apprehensive about this and the Government must show them a roadmap and a shared journey. That is something that could be done at Government level and it has to be done.

I also echo the huge disappointment about missing a trick as regards dealing with protections within this Bill. Doing so would mean we would be protected if the State were foolish enough to follow through on CETA and particularly the investor court system. I hope we do not go down that road and that we do not leave ourselves open to being taken to the cleaners by big business. We will have missed a trick by not dealing with that within this Bill.

To deal specifically with farming, we spoke about the CAP question earlier and every speaker referred to the necessity of not only delivering a steady supply of safe food but also of having sustainable family farms. I have already stated that many people in rural Ireland, and many farmers, are apprehensive about this and there is a need to deal with all those stakeholders. It is absolutely necessary and will also make the Government's actions on climate change easier to deliver.

Deputy Carthy and I recently attended a meeting with the local IFA in Monasterboice, at which it specifically dealt with the changing nature of dealing with climate change. People spoke about renewables, difficulties they had with microgeneration schemes and a number of things that must be dealt with. There were a huge number of people there who saw the necessity for change. What they need is interaction from the Government and a deliverable roadmap. I accept that we are going to have to do this in every sector but we need to ensure that we bring as many people along the road as possible.

I ask the Minister to look at a number of Sinn Féin's amendments, particularly those that relate to certain protections and lay out the detail on the just transition. We need to make sure there is a level of accountability from this House as regards any changes or plans that are put in place but, beyond that, that we must also ensure the necessary interaction with all those stakeholders takes place. We all have a stake in this. This is about delivering our future and that of our children and grandchildren. We all have a part to play but there is a missing link at this point in time. This has to be about a just transition. It has to be about delivering what is possible and what will deliver for our people, not only environmentally but in a viable, sustainable and economic way that does not hurt those who are already being hurt. We need to put protections in place and I ask the Minister to look at the Sinn Féin amendments in that regard.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: I rise to support amendment No. 20, which I understand is in this grouping. The reason we are so exercised about the just transition is that we all, from our various perspectives, feel strongly that, for workers in the sectors where there is a transition to be made, that transition must be a just and fair one. The State should recognise that by ensuring a funding line into it and supporting it using all the mechanisms of the State that can be employed to ensure the transition takes place in a fair manner. I refer to agriculture in particular because if we are moving towards this transition, there must be some recognition that farmers may have to change. If funding lines such as schemes and supports through CAP or the European Union are changing, that transition must be made as just and fair as possible. People involved in agriculture must be part of that process. They need to feel they have ownership of that process and that it is not foisted upon them.

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The reason I am so exercised about the de facto deletion of any reference to just transition in the Bill - save for one, which is not substantial - is that I was on the Joint Committee on Climate Action with the current Minister before he became a Minister. Deputy Eamon Ryan, as he was at the time, played a massive part on that committee and people like me supported the ask that just transition be reflected in the report arising from the Citizens' Assembly deliberations. That is why it is very hard to understand why now, in framework legislation, there is no reference to the just transition or any substantial definition of it. Even if one were to take the Minister at face value about the legislation he is promulgating and accept that there will be sectoral plans dealing with agriculture, transport and all the other areas affected by climate action, there should still be some guiding definition of the just transition. Then, in agriculture, for instance, when devising sectoral action plans for afforestation, the principles of the just transition would have to be applied to make it as fair as possible for people who operate in that sector. That is the logic of the amendments on the just transition and that is where we are coming from. I cannot understand why the Minister has taken such a stern line on this issue. It is something the Green Party put forward in its own just transition Bill when in opposition. I do not understand why it is demurring or withdrawing from it now. We have not heard from the Minister what his plan is regarding this issue.

We put down amendments on afforestation targets because year after year, we are missing targets on afforestation. We have heard about this chapter and verse. Deputy Fitzmaurice is one of the strongest voices on forestry licences in this Dáil and we have always supported him when it comes to the plight of people in the forestry sector. I am dealing with cases relating to that issue in my own constituency. My point is that if we had a proper target for afforestation and a proper, fit-for-purpose forestry service to enable forestry licences for felling and growing to be procured in a timely fashion, that would feed into this climate agenda. It is not being considered in this legislation, because I am being told the idea of having a sectoral target for afforestation is a charge on the Exchequer. This is the new tool now being used for legislative purposes to block amendments. I understand the ruling of the Chair of the committee and I always abide by those rulings, as I do by those rulings made by the Ceann Comhairle, because I respect parliamentary tradition and the rules laid down by this House. However, there comes a time when it is necessary to push back against what I call a tool being used to block what we consider very effective and genuine amendments to encourage the planting of more trees and feed into this agenda more effectively. When seeking to amend the legislation to that effect, though, we are told that there will be a charge on the Revenue to have a sectoral plan. That defies logic in my book.

I think today is Bloomsday. I am not a Joycean scholar by any manner or means, but I think we would all have admired Nora Barnacle for the way in which she was able to marshal Mr. Joyce. One day, she asked him why he would not write books that people can read. I think that sentiment would appeal to some of us here. We might not be Joycean scholars, but we can certainly appreciate the global impact James Joyce had in respect of Irish literature. It is not, however, to everybody's taste. In the same vein, I ask the Minister to write legislation that everybody can read, write in the just transition element as an abiding principle and then work through all the sectoral plans.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: I welcome the opportunity to speak on these amendments on the subject of a just transition. The Minister referred to retrofitting a great many houses in the midlands when he spoke about the just transition and that being a part of such a just transition. Funnily enough, Roscommon County Council is sending out letters to people, and elderly

people first of all, who might be putting in windows, doing up a roof or fitting insulation. Letters are being sent out, one after another, to tell those people that the council's budget is gone. It is not the fault of the council and I am not blaming it. However, let us not be talking out of the two sides of our mouths by saying we are going to retrofit a certain number of houses, while we are still going to leave these people, and especially our elderly people, vulnerable in counties all over the country.

When we talk about a just transition, therefore, let us not put the cart before the horse. Let us ensure that we have the funds in place. Retrofitting a house, including a deep or medium retrofit, costs money. In addition, we must remember all the new regulations and the increase in the price of building materials in the context of this climate agenda. I was talking to a builder yesterday and it is now being reckoned that an extra €90,000 has been added to build what was a €300,000 house. There has been an increase of more than 35% on everything. It is now a bargaining tool in respect of getting materials, which is a really problematic situation.

I am not going to dwell on this point for too long, but I cannot see how this Bill will be of any use for rural Ireland. The Minister spoke about the just transition. In the last few hours, the courts have overturned planning permission for the construction of a wind farm in the midlands, with wind turbines that are similar to those being erected all over the country. They do not create jobs. For the life of me, I cannot understand why seven lorryloads of diesel or heating oil are going into data centres in this city, when we are here talking about climate change, because the ESB will not guarantee the power supply. There is something illogical about what we are doing in this country when we talk about a just transition. Workers in the midlands are not allowed to mill peat, but we can bring it into the docks on a boat. Peat briquettes are also coming in from Germany, Estonia, Latvia and other countries, while Bord na Móna must get out of producing them in four years' time.

Turning to the forestry sector, while we have one, a Minister of State is responsible for it. We have had mention of this great figure since 2016 of 8,000 ha each year. There is not a farmer that has a bit of confidence in that now. It is a Department in chaos, with a Minister of State that will not take it by the scruff of the neck. It will not change because when courage is lost in an industry, it is gone. This is an industry which is under ferocious pressure to get enough timber for the mills, while there is talk then about 8,000 ha a year. It is pure BS that we are talking. We are writing down stuff here about achieving X, Y and Z, with this offsetting that. It is not going to happen unless civil servants within Departments change their attitudes and unless there are also changes in certain Departments. That is the bottom line, and that will not happen in this country for the simple reason that there is no one to crack the whip now.

Regarding the farming community and rural areas, the Minister referred to bringing a Luas, tramlines or something to Cork, but there does not seem to be anything at all for Galway city. Nothing must be wanted there. It must be fairly handy that the cars can shoot around there, even though there is chaos. We need the outer bypass done in Galway. Moving on to rural transport, I got phone calls yesterday from people who want such transport, but they cannot get it because of Covid-19. When I was going to school, it was like "The Late Late Show", there was a bus for everyone in the audience to go to national school. Hardly a youngster now, however, is able to get a bus and we are talking about the climate. We are basically talking out of the two sides of our mouths at the same time.

Looking at agriculture, I refer to people who will vote for the Mercosur deal, CETA or any of these deals. I read an article two days ago about the rainforest being hammered down, and

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yet the EU, the unelected bureaucrats, will still do deals with all the countries involved to bring beef across. We have become nothing but salespeople and all we want to do is to tick a box. I predicted before, and I repeat it here on the record of the Dáil as this Bill is going through Report Stage, that we are going to run out of power by 2026. I say that because RTÉ had a big report - I would call it propaganda - about the coal-burning power station below in Moneypoint changing over to a new hydrogen system. It was reported as if it were around the corner and it would nearly be happening the next day, but it is ten years away. I have also spoken to people involved with wind energy projects out in the sea and they say such projects will require ten to 14 years to reach fruition. However, we are now stopping the clock on places like Shannon-bridge and Lanesborough power stations. We are basically leaving people without jobs.

We talk about all these jobs that will be created, but it is all cuckoo stuff that we are talking about. Those jobs do not exist now and people have not got them. We should ensure we have balanced regional development. A person on the advisory council said that the only approach was to cull the national herd. We cannot have people making decisions out in public. Half the people on that council should be from rural Ireland, and not a team of people from universities or from the different places in cities who do not understand the rural way of life.

I want to make one point very clearly, because I know that the Minister is not going to accept amendments and he is going to ram this Bill through as best he can using the guillotine. I cannot for the life of me understand how Fine Gael and Fianna Fail Deputies from rural areas will stand up tonight and press a button to agree with the Minister's Bill. The Minister will come and go, but one thing I guarantee is that rural Irish people will stand their ground. If the Minister starts tampering with them or hammering them, they will stand up. The Covid-19 crisis will go and people will be able to go out and protest. I guarantee that will happen within the next six months if the Minister tramples on people's feet.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): The Deputy will have two minutes later if he wishes to contribute again. Deputy Bruton is next.

Deputy Richard Bruton: It is very important to state what this Bill is about. It is about creating a framework through which this country can confront a climate crisis that is threatening livelihoods not only in Ireland but right across the globe. This legislation is, for the first time, providing for a clear, transparent, accountable method through which we can identify what needs to be done and make Ministers and sectors accountable for progressing that. It is not going to be easy. Many people were critical of the climate action plan that I introduced, which envisaged 1 million electric cars on the road by 2030, 500,000 homes retrofitted and so on. It contained many ambitious targets, including the generation of 12 GW of renewable energy, but the reality is that we need to do more and this Bill enshrines doing more.

Most Members support the targets that are being set. Indeed, most of the Opposition is looking for even higher targets than those set in the Bill. That is the background. It is disheartening to listen to this debate because so far, no Member has addressed how we are going to achieve the targets that we all know need to be reached. It is interesting to note that people outside of this House, whether they represent the agricultural sector or any other sector, recognise that this change needs to be made. When one comes in here, one would think one was listening in a different world from that inhabited by everyone outside in the community. The wider community is being poorly represented by those who say "not an inch" and that they will attack this in every way. They assert that they will see the back of every Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, or Green Party Deputy who backs this Bill but they are sticking their heads in the sand. They are ensur-

ing the future for their communities will be worse because we are not starting to address these challenges. That is what they are doing but they are doing it by way of veiled threats against others, claiming that there will be a day of reckoning.

I fully support the idea of a just transition but when one reads the amendments, one sees that there are 11 different versions of what Opposition Members want in this regard. When one reads into the detail of what is being sought, one can see how difficult it would be for the Minister to accept them. They want to maintain social consensus throughout this process but that is going to be very difficult. These are difficult changes that will be challenging but at some point we have to act. We cannot just wait for another discussion and another round of hoping to find social consensus. They want those who are affected to maintain their current income in all circumstances but the reality is that we have been using our planet profligately and we cannot compensate everyone. The taxpayer's pocket is not deep enough to ensure that everyone is left no worse off than before. This is a transition to a new life and a challenging change that we need to make as a community, together. The importance of this Bill is its creation of a framework for doing that together.

The definitions of justice offered by the Opposition include a requirement to be morally fair, reduce inequalities and protect people against financial hardship but a climate Bill cannot do all of those things. They are the task of Government and this Oireachtas, seeking to manage the many challenges we face, including economic, social and climate challenges. These are not provisions that can be written into a Bill, with a Minister made accountable for them. Members opposite cannot say that they will not move an inch until all of these requirements are met. That is simply not realistic politics and many of those articulating this know that it is not realistic politics but they want to create a "heads I win, tails you lose" situation with the people who are trying, in an honest way, to confront the global challenge. It reminds me of the late Brian Lenihan who, when asked about fair tax, said that the only fair tax is the tax that I do not pay. If that is our definition of fairness, we will never have fairness or a just transition.

At the heart of this Bill is a just transition and that is what I find so disappointing about this debate. Deputies are not talking about the substance of what we need to do. In the opening lines of the Bill's citation is a reference to approving a plan that will promote climate justice. It goes on to define what climate justice is about and refers to the most vulnerable persons who must be protected. It then goes on to say how the Minister must handle this. The Minister is required to ensure that a just transition to a climate neutral economy maximises employment and supports those who are most vulnerable in the community and those communities that are negatively affected. That is what is at the heart of this Bill but Opposition spokespeople are trying to pretend that is not the case. Not only is it at the heart of this Bill, the Government has shown its good faith and commitment in this regard. We already have a just transition commissioner and have invested substantially in just transition measures. The warmer homes scheme, for example, is going to be doubled, if not trebled, in the years ahead.

Work is going on in many areas but of course, we have to do more. One of the sectors in which we have to do most is agriculture. In the future, farmers will make money partly from producing food but also from farming carbon. Those on the benches opposite should be coming up with policy tools that will help us to reward farmers so that in ten years, they can have a healthy family farm income. It is doing farmers no service to just say we will not have this, that or the other. We have to come up with policy tools together that will address this problem. That is why the tone of this debate is disheartening. Deputies are claiming that this is an attack on rural Ireland.

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Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: It is-----

Deputy Richard Bruton: This is not an attack on rural Ireland.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: Of course it is an attack.

Deputy Richard Bruton: The only way rural Ireland will have a prosperous future is by adapting to these changes-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Deputy Healy-Rae, please allow the speaker to conclude.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: It is an attack-----

Deputy Richard Bruton: I remember when we were dealing with-----

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: It is an attack on rural Ireland.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Let the speaker conclude. You know how this works. You have had your seven minutes. You can have another two but you must let the speaker conclude.

Deputy Richard Bruton: People talk about this Bill being rushed but this legislation was produced in its original form in 2019. We had 50 hours in pre-legislative scrutiny when any Deputy could have come in and contributed. We had 14 hours of Committee Stage debate and none of the issues that are now on the agenda were raised and none of the Deputies who are protesting now contributed to that debate.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: Take that back.

Deputy Richard Bruton: This is a challenge that we need to start addressing----

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: Take that back now. Sorry, but Deputy Bruton cannot make a statement like that. A lot of these issues were debated last Wednesday and I spent several hours debating each one of them-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Deputy Healy-Rae, you will have your chance in a moment-----

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I am not going to listen to any Deputy coming in here, pointing a finger at us and saying that we did not participate in the debate.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): The next speaker is Deputy Tóibín-----

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: That is not true-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Please resume your seat.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: It is not right. It is not proper.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Please resume your seat.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: The Deputy must take it back from the record of the Dáil. He cannot say something like that.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): We are also not in the Chamber to shout people down.

Deputy Michael Collins: On a point of order, he needs to take that back. I certainly spent hours discussing this and our amendments. Every one of our amendments was refused and Deputy Bruton had better wake up and smell the grass growing. He and his party have been representing the rich farmers for all of his life-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): The next speaker is Deputy Tóibín-----

(Interruptions).

Deputy Michael Collins: ----- and what he wants to do here today is represent the wealthy-----

(Interruptions).

Deputy Michael Collins: ----- and the rich while the ordinary person is burnt alive on the ground.

(Interruptions).

Deputy Michael Collins: I have never heard the likes of it.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: We were before the committee-----

(Interruptions).

Deputy Michael Collins: He has been representing rich farmers all his life.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): I ask the Deputies to resume their seats.

Deputy Carol Nolan: On a point of order-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): There is no point of order. Deputies are having an argument across the floor-----

Deputy Carol Nolan: We submitted 90 amendments and it is not right to just completely dismiss them.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): That is not a point of order.

Deputy Carol Nolan: We are supposed to be in a democratic Parliament -----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Deputy, resume your seat, please. That is not a point of order

Deputy Carol Nolan: -----where everyone is respected. That is unbelievable arrogance.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Deputy, I have asked you to resume your seat.

Deputy Carol Nolan: That is what it is - arrogance and disconnect from ordinary people.

(Interruptions).

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Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Deputy, I have asked you to resume your seat.

Deputy Michael Collins: The high and mighty-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: As leader of the group, I ask Deputy Bruton to withdraw his allegation. In actual fact, as I said earlier, we were not even notified of the committee meeting even though we had tabled 90 amendments. A journalist rang us but we were not notified.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I am quite happy to acknowledge that Deputy Naughten stayed throughout the debate. Deputy Michael Healy-Rae was also there throughout the debate but none of the other Deputies who are here now, protesting loudly, turned up-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Excuse me-----

Deputy Michael Collins: That is incorrect. I was there at the debate.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Three Deputies attended.

Deputy Michael Collins: I was at the debate. How dare you. Correct the record of the Dáil. That man does not have a clue what he is on about.

(Interruptions).

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): I ask the Deputies to resume their seats.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: On a point of order-----

Deputy Michael Collins: He cannot be allowed to say that in the Dáil-----

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Deputy Carol Nolan attended-----

Deputy Michael Collins: I was there last Thursday and I spoke on an amendment-----

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: Some of the meetings were private-----

(Interruptions).

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Deputy McGrath-----

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: They were held in private.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Please let Deputy McGrath speak.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: It was very unfair of him to say that we were not at the committee meetings when most of the meetings were held in private and only members could attend.

Deputy Michael Collins: Deputy Bruton has misled the Dáil. I spoke on the amendments on Thursday for as long as the debate continued.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): This is not a cattle mart, where people stand up and shout and-----

Deputy Michael Collins: There is no need at all. He has been shouting lies. He has misled the Dáil.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): You will resume your seat.

Deputy Michael Collins: He needs to correct the record.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Ask Deputy Bruton to correct the record.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): I cannot see what the point of order is. The Deputies are shouting over and back.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: No. It is a point of clarification. Three Deputies in our group, namely, Deputies Nolan, Michael Collins and Michael Healy-Rae, attended.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Will the other two Deputies resume their seats and we will listen to Deputy McGrath for a second?

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Three of our Deputies attended when we found out through a journalist that the meeting was taking place. We were not even told it was on. I know where the blame lies there. The clerk to the committee was very nice to us about it but it happened. I am asking Deputy Bruton to please correct the record in what he is saying. Three of our Deputies attended and dealt with all of our amendments.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): We all know that the committee's schedule is available for all Members, whether they sit on a committee or not. It is available to every single Member so I do not accept that as a point of order. We are going to move on with our speaking schedule. I call Deputy Tóibín.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: He has to withdraw what he said.

Deputy Michael Collins: The point of order is that I attended one of the days of the meetings. Deputy Bruton says we never attended, only Deputy Michael Healy-Rae. I attended on the Thursday, as did Deputy Nolan. Deputy Bruton needs to correct the record of the Dáil. He may not have been in attendance. I do not know but I will not speak on his behalf. I will speak on my own behalf. How shameful he is.

Deputy Carol Nolan: We want this corrected. What we are asking for is reasonable. I attended last Tuesday and so did Deputy Michael Collins.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Does Deputy Bruton wish to retract any part of his contribution?

Deputy Carol Nolan: No. He needs to correct it.

Deputy Richard Bruton: I have no problem in acknowledging that some Members turned up but many of the Members who are loud in their protests did not turn up.

Deputy Carol Nolan: We turned up and stayed for hours.

Deputy Michael Collins: Deputy Bruton is saying we did not turn up. Can he be honest and say he made a mistake and move on?

Deputy Richard Bruton: That is the reality. When we could have gone through the amendments line by line and discussed them in a calm environment, which the committee provided for, the Deputies were not moved to discuss them in that way and so we were not able to tease

out the arguments that lay behind them.

Deputy Michael Collins: That is not true.

Deputy Richard Bruton: That is the problem we have had. We did not have that during pre-legislative scrutiny or in the committee rooms and it is extremely difficult to hear all the concerns in that environment.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Deputy Collins, resume your seat. I am ruling that we move on.

Deputy Michael Collins: Deputy Bruton made a statement and he does not have the decency to withdraw it.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Deputy Tóibín is our next contributor and I would ask everyone else to return to their seats.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I want to correct one matter. If a meeting is held in private and you are not a committee member, you cannot attend it. Most of the committee meetings were held in private. Go back on the records because that is the truth of what happened. I had a fierce interest in this but I was not a member of the committee. Most of the meetings were held in private and, as such, I could not attend. I want that to be understood.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): I do not want to contradict the Deputy but that is not true because last week I attended a private session of a committee that I am not on and it is a regular and common practice. I am ruling that out. We are proceeding with Deputy Tóibín and I would ask everyone for forbearance. A huge amount of work has to be done to-night. Deputy Tóibín has been standing for about six minutes waiting to contribute. I ask that he proceed uninterrupted.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Climate change is a real issue and climate change undoubtedly has to be dealt with. However, it has to be dealt with fairly and justly. The term “just transition” is in the Bill but the truth of the matter is that the people who are affected do not trust the Government on what it says about a just transition. I will tell the Minister why they do not trust the Government.

The fact of the matter is rural Ireland has suffered radically in recent decades in this country. We have a city state developing in this country. The size of Dublin is way out of kilter with the rest of the country. Even in Britain, London is considered too big for the rest of the country but London does not make up half the proportion that Dublin makes up of this country. Some 48% of the investments that happen in this country happen in the greater Dublin area.

The only reason we have seen any population growth happen outside of that in counties such as Monaghan, Cavan, Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, Laois and other counties is because they have become a commuter belt. We have tens of thousands of people leaving counties such as Meath every day and going into Dublin to work. They are living in a commuter hell. All the governments of the past 20 years have said to those people in those counties that if they want to live there, they had better commute two to three hours every day. We can see it in the population because if you are a young person or part of a young couple and you want to get a university-type job, you cannot get it in regional or rural Ireland. You must move to Dublin to get the job but you cannot live in Dublin so you have to live in the commuter belt.

You can see that in the age profile that is prevailing in this country. The average age of people living in Killarney is ten years older than of people living in Balbriggan. There is a massive and unending migration of people towards the greater Dublin area. The reason for that is the infrastructure has been going into that area in recent decades. The reason the infrastructure has been going in there is the political establishment is more and more Dublin-based. I listened to the former Minister, Deputy Bruton. His party, Fine Gael, is becoming a city party. Its centre of gravity is south Dublin. There are constituencies throughout this country that will never again vote for a Fine Gael Deputy because of what it has done to their constituencies.

If you look at the farming community, the average wage of a farmer is at least €10,000 less than the average industrial wage, but if you are a beef farmer, the average wage is about €10,000 and most of that consists of subsidies. Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and the Green Party in government have allowed a situation to happen in the beef sector whereby the producers are selling a product at below the cost of production to factories and supermarkets that are making supernormal profits out of that. Those three parties have allowed that dysfunction to happen. According to Teagasc, only 37% of farmers in this State can make a living off the farm alone. Another 33% of farmers can only make a living off that farm because they are working off the farm. About 30% of farmers are being driven into poverty and debt. Every year there are fewer farmers in this State.

When the people of the midlands and much of rural Ireland hear the Government talk about just transition, they simply do not believe it. Why would they? Actions speak louder than words and the actions of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party when they have been in government in recent years have let down rural Ireland and farmers radically. You need only look at the services that are being pulled out of rural Ireland. Post offices and banks are being closed and pubs and schools are closing. There are parts of this country where the schools are being closed and they are building new schools in Dublin. What economic sense says that a school should be closed in a rural area and a brand new school built in Dublin? None at all. Dublin is overheating as a result of this in terms of accommodation, transport and access to schools etc. There is a radical imbalance in the development of this country and it is being driven by 20 or 30 years of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Green Party governments.

How in the name of God, therefore, would anybody trust the Government when it says it will deliver on this and on just transition? Farmers look at what is happening and they see Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil signing deals such as Mercosur, which brings beef from countries that are felling the Amazon thousands of miles to this country at lower prices than beef is created here. At the same time the Government tells farmers we are all in this together in reducing the level of greenhouse gases that are being produced. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael also call for CETA to be passed so that Irish farmers have to go into competition with Canadian farmers in these products.

The evidence is clear and the only way the Government could convince rural Ireland and farmers it means business with regard to just transition would be to grab the beef sector by the scruff of the neck and force the factories and the supermarkets to operate in a fair supply chain, where the profit is fairly delivered over the three components of that supply chain. It should also start focusing on infrastructural development. One of the biggest infrastructural developments that will happen in the Limerick and mid-west will be bringing water to Dublin. What about bringing people or jobs to the mid-west?

8 o'clock

I have no trust in this Government when it comes to just transition and I have no doubt most

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of the farmers and people living in rural Ireland do not trust the Government either. This Bill and much of Government policy is being built on the backs of the people who can least afford it, the people who have been stuffed for generations by this Government.

That is one of the reasons I voted against this Bill on Second Stage and will be forced to vote against it again. I support measures that will fight against climate change but they must be fair and just.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Cathal Crowe): I call Deputy Naughten. I remind speakers that there is a mechanism for them to come in again for another two-minute contribution. If people have things to get off their chests, they will shortly be able to make their points.

Deputy Denis Naughten: I had hoped to be able to speak directly to my amendments but I do not think I am going to have the opportunity. I want to speak on Report Stage of this Bill. As I said in my contribution on Second Stage, we must bring in new legislation to deal with the challenges we have here. I did not have the type of legislation the Minister, Deputy Eamon Ryan, is bringing in available to me when I was Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment. In fact, the initial work on this legislation commenced when I was Minister. We commenced that work because it was important that we took action quickly. If we delay action, it will mean that we will face even more drastic cuts down the road.

I represent a constituency that faces a greater impact in terms of climate than most other constituencies across the country. There is a focus on the peat-fired power stations in the midlands, particularly those in Lanesborough and Shannonbridge, and the impact their closure will have from an employment perspective. The vast majority of the 169 families who looked for voluntary home relocation are either in my constituency or adjoining it. Many of the people concerned have lived for generations in those particular homesteads and are now being forced out because of the changing climatic conditions in this country. The same applies to farmyard relocations.

In my contribution on Second Stage, I gave an example of how slowly policy is being implemented. The decision was taken in January 2018 to stop putting any further fossil fuel buses on our roads as part of our public transport service. However, the very first double-decker electric bus will not be on the streets of this city until January 2023, five years after it was first proposed. Many of the speakers here this evening have spoken about the issue of data centres. Three and a half years ago, the matter was debated at Cabinet and a policy decision was taken to restrict the number of data centres that were being developed in this country. Three and a half years later, the regulator is only now saying that we must begin to put the brakes on. I understand the frustrations that are there. Minister after Minister and Government after Government have wanted to make a real difference but the levers to make it are not there. We need this legislation so that we have a long-term sustainable planet.

I attended all seven sessions on Committee Stage and debated each of the amendments I put forward. The Minister will agree that none of my amendments would water down the impact of this legislation. I have concerns, one of which is that the legislation should reflect, as has been recommended by the climate change advisory council, the setting of separate targets for agricultural and biogenic methane. I believe it is a weakness of this legislation that the clear recommendation of the climate change advisory council is not reflected in it.

The other issue I wish to raise is that the sectoral targets should be debated and approved

by Dáil Éireann. It is wrong that is not happening because unless we have a full, open and responsible public debate in this Chamber, we will not get buy-in from the public. If we do not get that buy-in, we will not be able to achieve the targets or implement the measures that need implementation as soon as possible.

I am not going to oppose the passage of this legislation. However, I ask the Minister, as I did on Committee Stage, to carefully consider the two sets of amendments I have put forward. Those amendments would strengthen the implementation of this legislation and the ability to deliver it, while providing a just and fair transition to every community around the country. Let those communities be a part of that transition and work with Departments and agencies to deliver it. I fear, given the way this legislation is drafted, that it will come back to bite the Minister. If he does not accept my amendments tonight, I will give the Minister the opportunity to consider them again in the autumn, at which time I will bring forward amending legislation that will reflect those amendments. If the Minister does not accept my amendments tonight or in the Seanad next week, I hope he will accept them when we come back in the autumn. They are submitted in the interests of the proper and fair delivery of what must be a just transition that brings our citizens and people with us on the journey and avoids the type of adversarial debate we have heard here tonight.

Deputy Matt Shanahan: I wish to speak in support of the amendments Deputy Naughten has put forward on behalf of the Regional Group. I have a particular concern around the agricultural sector. There has been discussion in the media in recent months that has tacitly steered towards the identification of the agricultural sector as a big problem in terms of climate. I do not think that is entirely justified. We have previously spoken about the issue of biogenic methane. New Zealand has come up with a construct that separates biogenic methane from the overall calculation of greenhouse gases. That should have been done with this legislation but the Minister has chosen not to. We need to recognise that farmers are the custodians of the general environment and countryside. They will be the custodians of the future agrifood sector. It does not make sense to me at all that we could, in the future, be looking for reductions in the national herd and in beef production while we watch the EU taking beef from South America under the Mercosur deal. The rainforest is being cut down in order to supply that product to the EU. That makes no sense and will do absolutely nothing to mitigate climate change. It will, in fact, contribute to it.

We have a dysfunctional forestry sector at the moment. We have one of the lowest proportions of forestry of any European country. We are trying to be self-sufficient and have made very poor attempts in the past 12 months to provide some functionality to the sector. If our actions on forestry are an indicator of what we are going to do on climate change, we certainly will not be successful and yet the agricultural sector will be picked on as an easy outlier.

Some years ago, I was involved in a business that sold energy saving equipment into the public sector. I gave it up after 18 months because it was nearly impossible to bring about change. I have a feeling that we will be in the same place again.

What is happening to the grants for solar arrays and connections that were promised to farmers in recent years? We could be doing much more to develop renewable energy but that has not been happening. This Bill refers to renewable energy at a time when, as has been alluded to already, it appears we have entered into more than 20 contracts with international data centres. There is much that is not right with this climate Bill. At the same time, I, like everybody else, recognise that we must start doing something for the environment. Along with Deputy Naught-

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en, I will support legislation which we, in the Regional Group, hope to introduce after the recess and which we hope the Minister will consider. I ask him to think long and carefully about the farm and agrifood sector. It is a prince among the economic components of this country and is totally ingrained in the Irish culture. The damage that we can do will last a very long time and will do very little, I suspect, to mitigate climate change.

Deputy Jackie Cahill: This is an extremely important piece of legislation. As we are discussing this tonight, 160 million people in the world are starving in famine conditions. As we speak, 2 billion people in the world tonight do not have an adequate diet. While we have to, therefore, recognise that as a country we must face up to climate change and reduce our emissions, we also must accept that we have a responsibility to produce food in this country.

We are the most sustainable producers of dairy in the world and the fifth most sustainable producers of beef. There is, therefore, a huge responsibility on us to produce food for the world population. And yet, some commentators say we do not have a moral responsibility. The response is yes; we have. We must do it in a sustainable way, however.

I hope we will start to embrace the available technology. Much new technology is available to reduce emissions. Those commentators come out with the easy, lazy line that we have to cut the national herd. That option has to be completely off the table. It makes absolutely no sense from a world population point of view. Economically, for Ireland as a country, it is a route we just cannot go down. I say yes; produce food sustainably and adopt modern technologies. The modern technologies are there but the issue is in dealing with slurry, the use of renewable energy, advancement in fertiliser use, protected ureas, etc. We are significantly behind the rest of Europe and the rest of the world in embracing many of these new technologies which can help us reduce our emissions.

I am a member of the Government but there are some parts of this Bill to which I will refer. Last year, the Climate Change Advisory Council recommended that a separate budget for biogenic methane should be incorporated into this Bill. I regret that is not there. I accept that there is recognition of the different components of biogenic methane and the fact it is a short-lived gas. I accept that recognition will be taken of the importance of the agrifood industry to the country and the importance of our national herd. I would like if that had been written into the Bill. As has been stated already, New Zealand has adopted that practice; a country with a very much similar profile to us. The Bill recognises biogenic methane as a separate gas. The Minister will have a responsibility to ensure there is a separate budget when this comes to his door. As I said, we have a huge responsibility in this country. We have the ability to produce food in a very sustainable manner.

I also mention the ability of our agrisector to sequester carbon. Again, I would like more recognition in this Bill of the change in practice that will be adopted going forward, and the extra carbon that will be sequestered by farmers. There needs to be a plus column for that and a recognition of the ownership of that sequestration of carbon. Again, that is something I would like the Minister to take on board and accept. Farmers are fully conscious of their role as custodians of the environment. It is in their interest, more than anyone else, to preserve our green image we so vehemently protect. Biogenic methane and our ability to sequester carbon must be recognised.

I mention our forestry sector and our failure over the last number of years to meet targets as regards afforestation. Over the last five years, we are 15,000 ha short of the target set by various

Governments. Taking into account felling and replanting, the ability to have that 15,000 ha in their lifetime would sequester 75 million tonnes of carbon. There is, therefore, a huge responsibility on this Government to get our forestry sector into gear. We have had numerous discussions in this House and at the Joint Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine, of which I am Chairman, about the ineptitude of the Department at the moment in issuing licences, and the way it has paralysed our forestry sector. While that is bad enough economically and doing huge damage to the forestry sector, whether it is the farmers, millers or timber contractors - the list goes on - the imbalance that is doing for our sequestration of carbon is also a huge factor.

I appeal to the Minister, Deputy Ryan, to push the issue at the Cabinet table that our Department must start issuing licences. The Department told us that it will issue 4,500 licences per year. During the month of May, it was at 40 or 45 licences per week, which means it will find it hard to hit 2,000 licences in this calendar year. I also spoke to a nursery owner today who told me that we will be lucky to hit 25% of the target for afforestation, which is set at 8,000 ha for this year. We can, therefore, do a lot to increase our carbon sequestration in this country. I accept that there is provision in the Bill for biogenic methane. I would prefer if a separate budget was set in the Bill for it. Hopefully, the Minister will take that on board.

There must also be a recognition of the ability of the agrisector in terms of carbon sequestration. And yes; farmers are nervous of this Bill. Farmers also recognise that they have to adapt. While we are virtually the most sustainable producers of food in the world, we must recognise that climate change is a fact of life and our practice has to change. However, that cannot affect the economic sustainability of food production in this country.

Deputy Seán Canney: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this Bill. As a rural Deputy, I have no problem with climate action. I believe it is important that we bring about an all-inclusive climate action plan. There are certain aspects to the Bill, however, including the amendment the Regional Group has put down with regard to biogenic methane. It has not been helped by the fact that the amendments are not being taken on board.

I have spoken to many people including farmers and farmers' organisations. Many people are of the view that while we have said, in all we have done, that climate action is for everybody, and everybody should be on one road with this, we have no other choice. The concerns are that some of the things that are being done are not fair on certain sectors of society.

To address climate change, it is important that the Bill accurately reflects the different global warming impacts associated with biogenic methane and provides farmers with fair and reasonable means to manage emissions and reduce the impact on the environment. The carbon budget must take into account all removals as well as emissions, and this should be explicitly stated in the Bill.

To best represent the temperature impacts and the distinctive characteristics of biogenic methane as a short-lived climate pollutant, it is proposed that a separate target for biogenic methane should be set. That is our amendment. However, this has not been taken into account and it should be taken into account tonight. I implore the Minister and the Government to look at this in a reasonable way. It is not something that goes against what we want to do but it makes it fairer.

The other concern farmers have is the fact that their herds may have to be cut to meet targets. When we do that, we are reducing the ability of farmers to produce food. The question

then arises as to where the food will come from in that case. If the beef is coming from Brazil or other countries, the production may be far less carbon-efficient than is the case with the meat produced in this country. Is the issue of carbon leakage being taken into account in this regard?

There are provisions in the Bill that are unacceptable and frightening for the farming population. That is clear to any Deputy from a rural constituency where there is a large number of family farms. Farmers are frightened by some of the provisions and there is no relief for them in the Bill. Ireland is rated number one for milk production in Europe and number five for beef production in a carbon-efficient way. That is not being taken into account and there is no recognition of what farmers are doing in that regard. I agree, as I said before, that action is needed, but the action needs to take account of the family farm and the crucial role it plays in food production. Climate action also requires recognition of farmers' ongoing implementation of realistic climate measures and the potential for farming to sequester carbon.

In case there is any doubt about it, let me be clear that farmers are willing to put their shoulder to the wheel and face up to the challenge of climate. However, the Bill, as structured, has the capability to drive farmers away from farming and leave rural areas devoid of economic activity. If we look at the population that is farming across Europe and Ireland, we see that very few young people are taking it up as a way of life. We are gradually progressing to the stage where we will have only big farmers and no small farms. There will be mass production of food and a serious impact on the quality and uniqueness of the food we produce in this country unless we nurture our family farms and ensure they can continue to operate in a viable way, while also addressing the climate issues that have to be addressed.

I am very disappointed that no account is being taken of any of the amendments that were brought forward. The Minister is rejecting all of them. This Bill should not be divisive, pitting one person or part of society against another. It should be a project we all do together as legislators. It is very disappointing that no heed is being taken of reasoned amendments from across the floor of the Chamber. Even rural Deputies from the parties in government are expressing concerns because of this lack of recognition for what we are trying to do together, rather than having something that is done by the Government. I appeal to the Minister again, at this late stage, to consider the amendments that have been brought forward by the Regional Group. They are reasonable and have been proposed for a very specific reason, which is to strengthen the Bill. We can always criticise any part of any Bill. We do not want to criticise this Bill but we must do so because it is flawed in how it has been dealt with in terms of the treatment of amendments from Deputies.

Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications(Deputy Eamon Ryan): It is appropriate that Deputy Canney was the last speaker because I want to say to him that I absolutely respect every Deputy in this House, their integrity in putting forward amendments and their representative role in trying to strengthen the Bill. However, I will not be accepting this group of amendments because I believe the Bill has real strength and these proposals would not strengthen it further. That is not to disrespect any Deputy and what he or she seeks to do or achieve.

These amendments revolve around the issue of just transition and the role it has in climate action. I agree it is critical and central. In considering this issue, I called to mind the change in the political climate since 2015, when the original legislation was introduced. In raising this, I mean no reflection on Deputy Naughten, who was involved in bringing forward that legislation, but, rather, that the 2015 Act reflected the political climate that existed at the time. Several of

the amendments relate to the Long Title of the Bill. The Long Title of the 2015 Act, which is the precursor to this Bill, is quite succinct and includes the words “for the purpose of pursuing the transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy”. The Long Title of this Bill is a reflection of a change that has occurred since 2015. It is similar to the 2015 text but there are important differences. It refers to “the transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity rich and climate neutral economy by no later than the end of the year 2050” - the inclusion of a target date is critical - and also includes the words “and to thereby promote climate justice”. At the centre of the Long Title, and right through the Bill, is the understanding that climate justice must involve a social as well as an ecological transition. That is to say it must be a just transition. The respect I have for the Oireachtas and its processes is reflected in the fact that the amendment to include the reference to just transition, as well as the climate justice provisions, came from the Oireachtas committee. It was not drafted by our public servants, as good a job as they have done, but, rather, it came out of the pre-legislative scrutiny process, which was, in effect, almost a Committee Stage process in that it went through the text line by line and word by word.

The reason I mention 2015 specifically is that there is a particular profound change that has happened since then, namely, that we now have the Paris Agreement. This Bill is very strong legislation, which is why it is difficult to accept amendments. Every single line and word in it has been teased out and thought about at real length over the past year. A key wording in the Bill and one of its strengths, which we discussed during the Committee Stage debate, is the requirement that what we do be consistent with the Paris Agreement. That is where the legal structure exists. The requirement for climate justice relates not just to international justice, although that is central, specifically the recognition that those who have done most to cause the problem have the greatest responsibility to solve it. In addition, there is our own definition of climate justice, as referred to by Deputy Michael Collins, which requires that there be a sharing of the burden in this country and protection for our most vulnerable persons. In our definition and in our attention to the requirement of just transition, it is those communities that are most potentially affected that will have to be cared for the most. That is centre stage right throughout the Bill.

We can all get heated and partial in this debate. I see Deputy Michael Collins has come back into the Chamber. He may have missed what I said at the start of my contribution. I absolutely respect his engagement with people in west Cork communities, on whose behalf he is seeking to amend the Bill. I differ in my view as to whether particular amendments would strengthen the Bill but I respect his intention in bringing them forward. We will not make this transition if there is not a sense that it is for everyone. It is for every single person and community, no one will be talked down to and nobody can, would or will be ignored.

I am particularly attentive to the needs of the farming community. I assure Deputy Canney that I have been talking to farmers as well and am aware that they are concerned. I am particularly aware that the existing system we have to transition out of is not a just system for farming. We do not have young people going into the sector and we are losing farmers. We need to change that. The farming community was particularly concerned in recent meetings I had with its representatives about the wording in the Bill around sinks. The question is whether there will be payment for sinks, not just sources. I looked at this in detail and talked to my officials at length about it. I looked at it right the way through and it seems, in fact, that we do have to account for sinks. We must follow the original UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in terms of its accounting mechanism. That is important for farming because, in my view, it gives

us the potential to develop a new income source for Irish agriculture. This is going to be good for Irish farming or else it will not work. This will bring in a new generation of young people, otherwise we will not achieve the protection of nature and the storing of carbon that we need.

This will not be easy. It will take time. One of the reasons there is pressure to get this Bill through is that we want to include this year and do not want to wait another. We are on a tight timetable. We must get this through before the summer recess so we do not have to wait another year. In the remainder of this year and into next year, it will change and it will keep going. As Deputy Bruton said, we will need to sit down and work out in real detail how we actually create the mechanisms to get that income for Irish farming. Moreover, this is not just about farming but it is about the trade unions, workers and communities as well.

I heard some people say Government cannot be trusted. This Bill will apply even if there is a change in Government. A future Parliament could always change it but I do not think it will because the whole world is going to be going in this direction and we will not want to shy away from the opportunities that will arise. The trust in this is in the detail. We cannot legislate here. This is setting out the structure and putting climate justice at the centre of everything we do. This is about how a target is actually set and then Government starts considering how we do it, and it is for Government. Central Government is needed, working with the Oireachtas. I am absolutely convinced we can and will be good at this. It will only work when we respect every section of our community in every part of our country, if we ask for help rather than telling people what to do and if we admit uncertainty. We will do this well, we will be good at it and it will be good for all our people. It will be a just transition.

An Ceann Comhairle: We have had 24 contributors to the debate so far. Others wishing to contribute at this stage, or others wishing to come back in, have just two minutes. I am not going to be able to pick out every hand so Deputies should give me time. Deputy Mattie McGrath was first.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

Deputy Darren O'Rourke: I am sorry, but we have had a three-hour debate on this group of amendments. The first amendment is in the names of a group of Sinn Féin Teachtaí Dála. I would like to push that to a vote at this stage. I think Standing Order 78 provides for that.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy cannot push it to a vote because there are Deputies offering to speak.

Deputy Darren O'Rourke: Does Standing Order 78 provide for termination of the discussion at this stage? We have had three hours of debate. I think Members would like the opportunity to have their say.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Standing Order provides for that in circumstances where a debate is being frustrated and it is the opinion of the Ceann Chomhairle that that is what is happening. My interpretation of what is going on here is that Members are making very genuine contributions. Whether we agree with them or not is a matter of opinion but they are quite entitled to make them and I am not going to close down this debate to have a vote for anyone until the time comes.

Deputy Darren O'Rourke: All right.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy McGrath is first, followed by Deputy Bríd Smith.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I thank the Ceann Comhairle. I appreciate his judgment and I value it. The Minister sounded very conciliatory. I said at the very start that I did not want anything to be personal, but he seems to be missing the point we are trying to represent that there are so many people he is not bringing with him. Ní neart go cur le chéile. Mol an óige agus tiocfaidh sí. We want the young people to be involved and to help and, indeed, we admire them. However, there is so much confusion and so much fear. Why the rush, why the indecent haste, why the guillotine and why reject all amendments? The Minister had a conciliatory tone, I appreciated it and it sounded great but why the rush then? Why not give enough time to debate it? I am not suggesting we delay it for two years. I am suggesting we delay it for a month or whatever and have proper debate and look at amendments.

The Minister should, as I said, talk to the farming organisations about what is being done in France with the methane gas. The Minister should prove us wrong about our worries. We did not dream them up. EirGrid is telling us things and the people are living through these issues. I, therefore, appeal again to the Minister - and our amendments obviously are not going to be reached - to reflect on this, in the conciliatory tone he has had in the last several minutes. He must understand our frustration and that of the people we represent. That is our job as Teachtaí Dála, messengers of the people. We represent the people here. In Deputy Nolan's constituency we have seen the damage of the so-called just transition which is an unjust imposition. Listen to the farmers, listen to the people who are out there. Listen to the people who are trying to get the warmer homes grant. Listen to the people trying to buy insulation. Listen to the people trying to build houses now when the prices have gone up 40%, mainly due to the carbon tax. Listen to the people who are buying briquettes imported from Germany and elsewhere because we cannot buy them at home. It is nonsense. In the same conciliatory tone, I appeal to the Minister, I beg of him to give us the latitude for a proper reasonable debate and time. Nothing more, nothing less.

Deputy Bríd Smith: Having listened to the Minister's response, and indeed to the debate, one of the most honest contributions came from Deputy Bruton. It was honest because he let the cat out of the bag as far as the Government is concerned when he said there is no way we can look after everybody, there is no way we can guarantee people's incomes will remain the same and there is no way everybody will be bailed out. That is the meaning of just transition for him. However, interestingly enough, the reality for him and for the Minister is that we will guarantee and continue to guarantee that we will maintain the same inequalities across society, if not deepen them. That is because what this Bill does is look after the richest, the 1% on this planet who benefit most from the destruction of this planet. For example, the giant corporations, the likes of Amazon, Google and eBay, will continue with unlimited expansion through the mushrooming of data centres throughout this country, consuming, as the Minister knows, the bulk of our renewable electricity and millions upon millions of gallons of water. We have just heard the imposition of water charges on the population being mentioned again.

The Minister said that just transition runs throughout the whole Bill. I am sorry but it does not. The Minister should read his own Bill again. Just transition is mentioned once, and mentioned with a get-out clause in the form of the following wording, "... in so far as is practicable ... [we will] support persons and communities that may be negatively affected ...". If it is not practicable, as Deputy Bruton said it was not, according to the continued injustice we have and the inequality across society, then we will maintain that and continue that and deepen it. That is not just transition. That is why we have endeavoured to define and spell out what just transition

means. The Minister has even refused amendments that would delete the words “in so far as is practicable”. In so far as is practicable, the Minister is protecting the *status quo* and at the same time trying to do the impossible. He must make stark choices and the choice he has made here is to throw ordinary people under the bus to allow corporations to flourish.

Deputy Michael Collins: The Minister has been speaking in a sort of conciliatory tone but the bottom line is that he is saying ask for help and we will all work together. That is basically what he is saying. However, he is not working with us. He has his mind made up. As I said to him, I met with the climate action groups in west County Cork on numerous occasions. This is a huge insult to them, forget about me as an elected representative. The Minister has decided that the decent amendments put forward by elected representatives were not fit to be read or accepted in any way, no matter what. These people put forward ideas to me and I worked with them. I put forward some of those ideas as amendments, and others from other organisations, such as farming organisations, but the Minister has rejected the whole lot of them. That is an insult to those climate action people in west County Cork. I will go back and apologise. I do not know who I will be apologising for. I cannot apologise on my own behalf because I have done exactly what they asked me to do.

Deputy Mattie McGrath asked the Minister to listen to the people and I am asking him to do the very same thing. He should listen to the people who have no public transport, the people who have no or poor school transport, the people who have poor rural transport. He should listen to young people who cannot get planning permission in their own farms at home. He should listen to the people who are subject to carbon tax and who are hit most by it; they are mostly from rural Ireland. He should listen to the farmers who are hurt the most. The Minister has schemes. We were talking about schemes here. I am worn out with eco schemes and dream schemes. We also have an organic scheme. The Minister has been in government twice and that organic scheme is an absolute disaster. To think the Government is looking at another dream scheme when it already has an existing good environmental scheme and it cannot further it beyond what it is. I am asking the Minister to look at this.

We need to be looking at towns and villages and plenty of places in west County Cork, including Castletownshend and Goleen, where raw sewage is going into the tide. This climate action Bill is not going to act as a deterrent here. The Minister is being asked to accept our amendments and we have been very genuine in putting them forward. I ask him to reconsider that. He should not insult the people, who are basically from his own party, and from his own support group in west County Cork and throughout the country, by rejecting every one of these amendments.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for not shutting down this debate and instead using his experience and expertise to know that what is being said here tonight probably amounts to some of the most genuine contributions on one of the most important subjects that will affect the Irish people for many years. Shutting it down would indeed be totally wrong so I thank the Ceann Comhairle.

I have listened very carefully to what the Minister has said not just tonight but on every other day or night on this. I really cannot understand why he cannot see other people’s perspectives or have respect or understanding for people who are concerned about this. I cannot understand why the Minister cannot see that the amendments have been proposed with nothing but good faith. They were proposed at the behest of the people we represent.

Does the Minister realise there are people in the countryside worried by the implications of what he and his party have proposed? It is not my job to speak about other parties but I must be a political realist. A number of years ago Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael would have been outraged at even the suggestion of what the Minister is pushing through tonight. As a result of the political reality that is the make-up of the current Government, those parties are now quite willing to bow to this and agree to dance to the green tune, no matter the decibel level to which the music is raised. They are quite willing to row in very obediently behind the Minister and support him, no matter how hurtful some of what he proposes will be to the Irish people and future generations.

Please do not ever try to paint us as people who are not concerned about the countryside. It is the exact opposite. We want to be custodians of the countryside and the environment in the same way as everybody else and perhaps much more.

Deputy Carol Nolan: I come back to the just transition, which we have spoken about extensively tonight. Speaking about it is not enough and we need the Minister to seriously take on board what we have said. We represent tens of thousands of constituents in rural Ireland. We represent the real workers facing the brunt of this. Has the Minister met the peat contractors or Bord na Móna workers at any stage? He claims to have the genuine interest of people at heart but, to be honest, he does not. This Bill, as I have said, will do irreparable damage. If the Minister really felt there was a need for transition that was just, particularly in the midlands, why is there only one reference to it in a document with 7,000 words? Is that how little he thinks of the midlands?

The Minister must take on board what is being said. He is demonstrating tunnel vision. From what I can see, the Green Party is being highly hypocritical. A Minister of State, Senator Pippa Hackett, came in here pledging to sort out the forestry crisis. She did not accept one amendment from us either and again demonstrated tunnel vision.

There are targets in the programme for Government that the Minister helped to devise with Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. The parties did a deal that will harm rural Ireland. There is a commitment to ensure 8,000 ha of forestry are planted annually. The Minister is not even reaching his own climate change targets, yet he is ready to punish people, including ordinary workers and families. Would it not serve him better to focus on the forestry and get more people involved in that sector? The Government should devise a proper policy and ensure licences can be released as soon as possible. Would that not serve him better? The Government might then be able to reach its climate action target of planting 8,000 ha of forestry annually.

It is totally hypocritical of the Minister to stand up in this Chamber and dictate to us with an advisory council on climate. We will not accept it now or ever.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: This Bill is totally undemocratic in that it gives the Minister the right to push through a carbon budget without a vote in Dáil Éireann. This Bill will hurt the people who get up early in the morning who must go to work. It will hurt hardest the people who create jobs and employ people. It will hurt farmers and there is no recognition of what farmers can do with carbon sequestration. In France, farmers are allowed to sell gas that is created from animals, which provides income for the farmers. The Government does not want to mention that.

The Government seems to want to ensure older people will perish with the cold if they are

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not allowed to cut turf and must get briquettes from Germany. Many of these people do not have the wherewithal to insulate their homes or install underfloor heating. They do not have the funding for it.

The Minister does not want us to build roads and prefers public transport. All the public transport is in Dublin, with buses running around empty or with one or two people inside. At the same time we cannot get any public transport down the country. The Minister has said we can get along with one or two cars for each village. Perhaps we could park it in the churchyard or somewhere. That is totally unrealistic.

The Minister is condescending and looking down on the rural people. He has suggested that reintroducing wolves would be good for us. Cop on, man. The Taoiseach and Tánaiste should cop on, along with the rest of the Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael parties. They are supporting this man in driving rural people into the ground. It is what he is trying to do.

Deputy Seán Canney: I thank the Minister for his comments on farmers. I do not for one minute doubt his total commitment to getting things right but, at the same time, he said this Bill is so well crafted, it cannot be changed, and that is a flaw. Deputy Richard Bruton stated earlier that people will be left behind, I suppose, and that is a fact.

People in Gort lost a bus service a couple of weeks ago. That was public transport and the only answer to such a problem now seems to be the private buses. We should think about people who cannot afford to put in the air-to-water heat pumps, a current technology for heating, as opposed to oil heating. They might have to spend up to €25,000 to have that installed in a standard house. There are grants for this but not enough. What do I say to the people in fuel poverty who are waiting up to two years for a retrofit inspection to be done on a house? What do I say to people who might want to buy an electric car but are afraid to do so because there are not enough electric chargers?

Many things need to be done. Sometimes we might rush ahead to become best in class, which is fine, but we are forgetting about the detail. The carbon budget will be set by the Minister outside the House but it is important to remember that with everything we discuss and change - we might have electric trains and buses with this, that and the other, with public transport for everybody - where will the money come to pay for it?

Deputy Darren O'Rourke: I have no interest in stymieing debate at all but I am very conscious we have spent the past three hours and 20 minutes speaking to three groups of amendments out of more than 160 amendments. We are discussing amendments Nos. 1, 3 and 19 to 23, inclusive. Many Members who went to the bother of tabling amendments have not yet had the opportunity to speak to them, although they are speaking to other amendments on other important matters. I thought if we could move from this group of amendments, we could move to amendment No. 2 and some Deputies could speak to their own amendments rather than those of other people.

It is really important we have an opportunity to vote on the question of a just transition. It should be at the very heart of this Bill.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy O'Rourke. I do not doubt the validity and sincerity of your points but when you are around here a bit longer, you will realise this is how things work.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: The Greens have always worn the clothes of a parliamentary party that is democratic and wants to work with everybody to achieve objectives. That pretence has been shed significantly today in what has happened. We have a situation where every single Opposition amendment has been refused. A good Dáil will work when legislation is rigorously tested and when the wisdom, knowledge, experience or influence of half the representatives of the people of Ireland are at least listened to, or they have some input. The Green Party has opted to refuse all of that today and this is a significant change to the way the Green Party has done business. It will also significantly change how people feel the Green Party has worked.

I listened to the response and I go back to the issue of trust. We have heard Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party talk about what they will do for farmers. As I understand it today, there is not one, single, microgeneration project that is actually feeding into the national grid at the moment. After all the talk, all the debate and all the issues we discussed *ad nauseam* in this House, not one piece of electricity is coming from microgeneration from a farmer or from a person locally. Anaerobic digestion, small-scale wind or small-scale solar projects that could put money back in the pockets of farmers are still not there at all.

Consider a country such as Denmark. When it wanted to rebalance the lopsided development that was happening there, they went ahead and built a new city called Aarhus. They put significant infrastructure and significant investment into an area outside Copenhagen to rebalance that country. This is what is needed here. An ambition like that would build trust back up with the people of Ireland.

Deputy Denis Naughten: I will raise one specific issue of the just transition, which is the 280 seasonal workers in Bord na Móna. The Minister will be aware that we had many discussions here in the House about putting in place a programme of bog rehabilitation. Significant funding has now been put in place from climate taxation directly to Bord na Móna, and through the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Bord na Móna has the bulk of those contracts also. The seasonal staff in Bord na Móna have received commitments from the company, and the arrangement with the group of unions is that they will secure work on an annual basis of equivalent financial value to what they would have earned in their seasonal work on the bogs. Many of these 280 employees of Bord na Móna have not been provided with any indication of where or when they will actually commence work. There is huge anxiety among this particular cohort of workers across the State and especially in the midlands. I urge the Minister to consider that talking of just transition is one thing, and implementing it is something very different. It is important that there is a clear and definitive statement provided to each and every one of those 280 workers as to when they will actually start work and for how long.

Deputy Matt Shanahan: I do not doubt the Minister's bona fides in his desire to bring in this legislation and to see just transition in the process. I put it to the Minister, however, that I am not sure he is listening, and especially to the agrisector. I am close to the agrisector and I have heard a lot of the concerns. I can tell the Minister there are a lot of farmers who feel that while something must absolutely be done in terms of climate, it must be fair. A cheese factory expansion in Belview in Waterford has been held up by An Taisce, largely on a philosophical debate around the intensification of farming. The milk yields down there are already being trucked 90 to 100 miles away to be processed. This is the future livelihood of farm expansion. People are, therefore, seeing this as a negative agenda for farming.

The other issue in just transition is carbon sequestering. I have asked a question and I have not received an answer about the carbon sequestering component that is given for hedgerows.

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In my county of Waterford there is a significant amount of woodland and hedgerow. I understand there is no component in just transition given to the agricultural sector for this.

These are some of the issues the farming sector and people generally in rural Ireland are concerned about. It behoves the Minister to engage with all of the Deputies in the House and I regret he is not taking amendments this evening. I ask him to please give access to rural Deputies and take on their concerns. They are Teachtaí Dála and messengers of the people. They are carrying very valid messages and concerns to the Minister and it behoves him to listen. If the Minister does so he will find greater support and, as he has described, maybe we can arrive at a just transition outcome together.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is any other Member indicating before I go to the Minister to respond? No. I invite the Minister.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: With the leave of the Ceann Comhairle and the leave of the House I would like a few minutes to answer the variety of points.

An Ceann Comhairle: No, I am afraid that the Minister has only two minutes.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: God Almighty. Two minutes. I absolutely accept the conviction of Deputy Smith. The corporations will have to play their part too and no one gets out of this. We also need the corporations: we will need the income, the jobs and the tax revenue to pay for our social services. We will go to those corporations and say that if we are going to run data centres they will have to be zero carbon too just like farming. No one gets out of it. No one gets by it. I am sure those corporations will want this. They will want to be part of a country that will set that high bar because that is where the future is. That is where security lies. That is where any modern new economy is going to go.

To respond to Deputy Nolan, I was proud to engage with Bord na Móna for more than 30 years. We set aside some €150 million all told to try to fund the immediate just transition in the midlands, in retrofitting houses and in getting jobs back in Bord na Móna such as rewetting the bogs and a range of community projects. It is frustrating that it takes time. We must obey European Union laws and rules and we must make sure that we do not get caught up here by having money spent in any way where i's were not dotted or t's not crossed. All the time I try to say to "Come on, let us get it out and run with this as quickly as we can", similar to Deputy Naughten. There is no shortage of funding for it because we believe in Bord na Móna. I absolutely believe that the company has a proud record and will have a proud future in going green.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae referred to anaerobic digestion. It is part of the way we can get farmers more income and we need to sit down and work out the mechanism of doing it. It has to be part of a land-use plan that puts rural community and development first. It must be microgeneration also. How long it takes is frustrating. We had it the last time we were in government.

There is no shortage of listening here. We have had 80 hours. We introduced the Bill in October and since then there have been 80 hours of committee hearings, parliamentary hearings and Second Stage debate, but it is time for us to turn and listen as we go. We have to listen now as we look at the solutions. It is time for the Bill to be put in place so we can actually set that high bar that delivers us all of these opportunities.

9 o'clock Amendment put:

Dáil Éireann

The Dáil divided: Tá, 61; Níl, 78; Staon, 1. TáBarry, Mick.Brady, John.Browne, Martin.Buckley, Pat.Canney, Seán.Carthy, Matt.Clarke, Sorca.Collins, Joan.Collins, Michael.Connolly, Catherine.Conway-Walsh, Rose.Cronin, Réada.Cullinane, David.Doherty, Pearse.Donnolly, Paul.Ellis, Dessie.Farrell, Mairéad.Fitzmaurice, Michael.Funchion, Kathleen.Gannon, Gary.Gould, Thomas.Guirke, Johnny.Harkin, Marian.Healy-Rae, Danny.Healy-Rae, Michael.Howlin, Brendan.Kelly, Alan.Kenny, Gino.Kerrane, Claire.Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.McGrath, Mattie.McNamara, Michael.Mitchell, Denise.Munster, Imelda.Murphy, Catherine.Murphy, Paul.Mythen, Johnny.Nash, Ged.Naughten, Denis.Nolan, Carol.O'Callaghan, Cian.O'Reilly, Louise.O'Rourke, Darren.Ó Broin, Eoin.Ó Murchú, Ruairí.Ó Ríordáin, Aodhán.Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.Pringle, Thomas.Quinlivan, Maurice.Ryan, Patricia.Shanahan, Matt.Sherlock, Sean.Shortall, Róisín.Smith, Bríd.Smith, Duncan.Stanley, Brian.Tóibín, Peadar.Tully, Pauline.Ward, Mark.Whitmore, Jennifer.Wynne, Violet-Anne.NílBerry, Cathal.Brophy, Colm.Browne, James.Bruton, Richard.Burke, Colm.Burke, Peter.Butler, Mary.Byrne, Thomas.Cahill, Jackie.Calleary, Dara.Cannon, Ciarán.Carey, Joe.Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.Chambers, Jack.Collins, Niall.Costello, Patrick.Cowen, Barry.Creed, Michael.Crowe, Cathal.Devlin, Cormac.Dillon, Alan.Donnolly, Stephen.Duffy, Francis.Noel.Durkan, Bernard.J.English, Damien.Farrell, Alan.Feighan, Frankie.Fitzpatrick, Peter.Flaherty, Joe.Flanagan, Charles.Fleming, Sean.Foley, Norma.Grealish, Noel.Griffin, Brendan.Harris, Simon.Haughey, Seán.Heydon, Martin.Higgins, Emer.Hourigan, Neasa.Humphreys, Heather.Kehoe, Paul.Lahart, John.Leddin, Brian.Lowry, Michael.MacSharry, Marc.Madigan, Josepha.Martin, Catherine.Matthews, Steven.McAuliffe, Paul.McConalogue, Charlie.McGrath, Michael.McGuinness, John.Moynihan, Aindrias.Moynihan, Michael.Naughton, Hildegard.Noonan, Malcolm.O'Brien, Darragh.O'Brien, Joe.O'Callaghan, Jim.O'Connor, James.O'Dea, Willie.O'Donnell, Kieran.O'Donovan, Patrick.O'Dowd, Fergus.O'Gorman, Roderic.O'Sullivan, Christopher.O'Sullivan, Pádraig.Ó Cathasaigh, Marc.Ó Cuív, Éamon.Phelan, John Paul.Rabbitte, Anne.Richmond, Neale.Ring, Michael.Ryan, Eamon.Smith, Brendan.Smyth, Niamh.Smyth, Ossian.Varadkar, Leo.StaonMurphy, Verona.

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Darren O'Rourke and Jennifer Whitmore; Níl, Deputies Brendan Griffin and Jack Chambers.

Deputy Holly Cairns did not vote in this division due to an agreed pairing arrangement with Minister Helen McEntee for the duration of the Minister's maternity leave.

Amendment declared lost.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I move amendment No. 2:

In page 5, line 10, after "promote" to insert "social, economic and".

I want to say how disappointed we are, as I said earlier, that we did not get proper time to debate this Bill fully, or any of our amendments or others. We have more than 90 amendments and there are more than 220 altogether. Is mór an trua é sin.

As I say, we want to bring the people with us. The Minister is conciliatory in his tone tonight but, in reality, he is not doing that. The Minister is not making any effort to placate the people who are concerned, the people who are worried and the people who are fearful. They need to get some modicum of reassurance that we want to bring those people with us. We want to care for them.

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In his reply to the Members, the Minister wanted more time than the two minutes and the Ceann Comhairle gave him a bit of latitude. The Minister referred to some of our points certainly, but I honestly believe he does not understand the concerns. The Minister is very passionate about the green agenda, and that is not a bad thing.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy McGrath, can I interrupt you?

Deputy Mattie McGrath: You can.

An Ceann Comhairle: Could we please have order in the House and a bit of respect for the Member in possession? Can Members leave quietly?

It would be good, too, if Deputy McGrath would speak to the substance of the amendment. We do not need to talk about the Minister. We need to talk about the substance of the amendment.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I am not going to speak because many Members want to speak and we are running out of time for all the amendments that are there. I have moved the amendment and I am merely saying it is disappointing that the Minister is steadfast. The Minister remains resolute that he will not accept any amendment - no matter what it is - except ones he himself brought forward to committee. That is a pity.

As I said, we feel passionately. Of course, we have a duty to care for the environment in the first instance. We expect everyone to do that but we also have put forward amendments to try to make this Bill in some way palatable and acceptable to the people of rural Ireland.

Deputy Michael Collins: Obviously, we are pushing forward with our amendments. They are of huge importance to the people we represent. I have spoken at length already on our amendments and other amendments, in fairness, that we would give serious consideration to.

I am disappointed that 238 amendments have been rejected, including our 75. Our amendments are very fair. I would not mind if the Minister rejected some of them. That is understandable. However, one of the amendments called for a 0% VAT rate on insulation products. That is what the Minister should be trying to achieve - encouraging people to insulate their homes and make them warmer so that not as much fuel is used, be it home heating oil, coal or briquettes. People cannot get briquettes from Ireland anyway and would have to bring them in from Germany to get any, but that is another legacy of the Green Party.

The Minister had an opportunity to consider the Rural Independent Group's amendments and must surely have looked at them. How can he then turn around and say he will not support any of them? If he did not support a 0% rate, it would have been fair for him to say he would cut it from 23% to 5%, 6% or 7%, but there was not a budget. In his head, our amendments were not to be supported no matter what we put before the House.

The two-year wait for the warmer homes scheme must be addressed. We felt that this Bill should have done so. People across my constituency are upset that they do not qualify because the criteria are set so high. Even if they can qualify, no one will come to insulate their homes before two years have passed.

Unfortunately, we will not get a chance to discuss other amendments relating to the agricultural sector. Experts have stated that we will face a 50% cull of the national herd. The former chair of the Climate Change Advisory Council, Professor John FitzGerald, stated that a dra-

matic reduction in livestock numbers was the only way to meet the targets the Government had set. The council proposed a figure of 3.4 million cattle by 2030. New Zealand is considering a 15% cull. That would be a disaster for the people of New Zealand, but we can only look after the people of Ireland.

We talk about creating new schemes. Even though it is a pilot, the new rural environment protection scheme, REPS, disqualifies people who have shrubs on their land. People believed that the Green Party being in government would protect them in this regard, but it has not. From listening to Deputies in the Chamber, I can tell that many of them are not from an agricultural background when they go on about new environmental schemes. There is also the organic scheme, but the Minister has failed to do anything with it.

Speaking to the amendment, people are finding it difficult to pay bills and put food on their tables. More and more people are coming to my clinics at the weekend, and I meet others or talk to them on the phone. They are struggling for their very survival. They do not see a way out. I see no way out in this Bill. I only see more difficulties for the people of rural Ireland because of it.

Our amendments also addressed the tourism sector. We are concerned because, if there is any increase in the cost of aviation fuel, it will damage the sector in west Cork. We have seen many difficulties due to Covid, so we cannot accept such damage. I want to protect beautiful areas like Clonakilty, Mizen Head, Castletownbere, Kinsale, Skibbereen, Bantry and Kilcrohane for people to visit. We need to encourage tourism, not discourage it. We wanted to move a serious amendment in that regard.

We had good amendments on public transport. If I wanted to attend a meeting in Dublin at 11 a.m. or 12 noon, I would be lucky to make it if I left that day. I would have to leave the day before. We do not have public transport in place in rural Ireland, and I do not see where in the Bill that will change. If it does not change, it will be catastrophic because the Minister is, with the support of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, supporting fuel price increases through the carbon tax. The carbon tax hit the pockets of only one group of people, namely, the people of rural Ireland. No solution has been provided, so there is no gain. Greenway funding has been sprinkled around the country, although every brown cent of it avoided coming to west Cork.

If the Minister wants to raise the price of fuels through carbon tax and hit the consumer in the pocket, he has to deliver something for them. He has to give people public transport. All of these matters are covered by our amendments. We were fair in our amendments, for example, setting a 1 km limit for children whereby anyone living 1 km or more away from school would get free transport. We need proper public transport. With his West Cork Connect business, Mr. Damien Long is trying to provide a service in the early morning from west Cork to Cork city so that people might link up with trains and so on. We need proper services that are funded properly. We have tabled amendments to ensure that happens on the ground, but the Minister is refusing to accept them. We will continue to fight for the ordinary people who are suffering so much.

An Ceann Comhairle: I do not want to interrupt Deputies or to tell them that they are out of order, but I will remind them that, on Report Stage, we are dealing with the minutiae of the Bill and the specific proposals. In this instance, the proposal is around the promotion of social and economy activity. It is a specific amendment and we need to speak to it, not to whatever you are having yourself. We cannot have Second Stage debates.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: My first point will be on economics. I honestly believe that if the Bill is implemented in full, it will break the country. The Government's suggestion is that everything will have to run on electricity, but it has closed down power stations. We have had three or four close calls since Christmas, including as recently as a couple of weeks ago. We do not have the facilities or ability to generate enough electricity. Take the data centres as an example. We have been told that they are using 8% of all electricity and that in seven years' time, they will be using more than 30%. The cost of electricity will increase and people will not be able to afford it. It has already increased, yet there has been little mention of it. The cost of everything has increased. The cost of electricity will certainly increase because it will cost more to generate and transmit it. The Government will have to consider using gas. It has ruled out the Shannon liquefied natural gas, LNG, project, but we need gas in the interim because the wind does not blow all the time and energy derived from wind turbines cannot be stored. No less than anyone else, I appreciate alternative energy. We should be pursuing it, but we are not and there is no mention of doing so in terms of solar farms or energy derived from our rivers. We cannot even smell near a river. We cannot clean out a river to help to prevent people from being flooded. Doing so would be a crime.

The trouble is that there is no proper recognition of the detrimental effect that the Bill will have on the economy. There must be room for gas to keep the lights lit. Methane gas from cows can be used to our benefit by providing gas which can be added to the grid.

The Minister will have to surrender his ideals that everything must be electric. Let us talk about electric cars. We do not have enough points to charge cars. In time, when things improve, electric cars may be fine, but at present they are not. It is not a sustainable idea for people to buy an electric car if they drive to Dublin or drive long journeys to work. If they have the windscreen wipers and lights turned on - people driving to work must have their lights on while driving in the morning and the evening - that brings more pressure. Electric cars are not an option at present. That is the honest humble truth and the Minister will have to wake up to that. People are being told to get rid of petrol and diesel cars. People do not know what to do at present, so they are not buying any car. Those in the motor industry will tell the Government that. People are getting one story from Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil that they should be using electric cars, but at the same time they know they are not reliable enough, until they are.

It is like the cutting of the turf. The Minister and the Government, it seems to me, are hell-bent on stopping rural people from cutting turf, like they did with Bord na Móna. That will happen in time when the present generation is no longer able to cut it and the younger generation may not be interested in doing so. That will happen in time, but the Government, in this Bill, is putting deadlines on the people, which I believe is wrong. The Government signed up to the Paris Agreement. I believe I was the only Deputy who, in late 2016 or 2017, voted against the deadline because it will be very unfair and unviable. It is going to hurt the working man, the farmer and rural Ireland more so than the urban population. I appeal to the backbenchers in the Government parties to consider that what is happening here is too quick and will affect ordinary working people, the working class, like nothing else has before. I am so concerned about it.

There were many people up in Dublin today - farmers from Kerry, poor people - and they said to me it is hard enough to carry on without having to come up to Dublin to drive home their point to the Government. The Government must realise that those people have many other things they should have been working on today, because fine days are scarce in Kerry. You talk about the climate, but it is a different climate, a different world, once you pass Macroom or Mallow. It is a different world altogether. You would know about the climate if you were trying to

survive where we are from. We can only get a couple of days.

Deputy Michael McNamara: I wish to speak in favour of this amendment. It is important we insert “social, economic and” into this Bill for the simple reason that when legislation is challenged in the courts on the distribution of State funds or what social end or economic principles are prioritised, the courts always take the view they will not hear this because these matters are determined here in this House. This is not a particularly detailed amendment. There are many other amendments I would like to support but I will not be able to because this Bill is being guillotined. My question is, in a democracy - I hope the Minister regards himself as a democrat – why can we not have a full debate? Why must it be guillotined? Why does this happen with every Bill of consequence? We spend hours ráiméising on statements on this and questions and answers on that. There are many questions, a few statements and never any answers. What is so frightening about debate? If the Government is confident in its position, stand over it. Do not send in the Chief Whip to guillotine a debate, as has been done tonight.

If this is, indeed, the Bill of a generation that is going to tackle climate change, I do not understand why the Minister will not debate it. I appreciate he believes he has the answers, but I hope he does not think we are all living in the midst of a Messiah. I am not sure whether the Minister is a Stone Roses fan or not, but the approach he has taken of “I am the resurrection and I am the life”, and that he is not going to listen to any other amendments from other Deputies, is perverse. It is anti-democratic, and the Minister is a democrat. At the very least, I know he is a democrat and he is a decent man.

What is it about being in government? Why is it that once he got inside Government Buildings, he now thinks he has all the answers, that nobody else has any, that he thinks he has a monopoly on truth and there be badness on the other side, and that he cannot even debate the Bill or even debate the economic principles? There are economic principles that I want to talk about. I agree that climate change is what this Dáil will be remembered for and how it treats it, more than how we disastrously deal with Covid in this State.

As a farmer and someone who grew up on a farm, I am willing to accept that perhaps we need a more plant-based diet. Perhaps we need fewer animal products. However, if we in the western world, in Europe, are to consume animal-based products, let us at least consume animal-based products that are produced in a place that is least damaging to the environment, that produces the least amount of carbon emissions. The Government’s Bill penalises that. It may be counter-intuitive to suggest that intensive farming is beneficial, but we know grassland that is grazed quite a bit sequesters more carbon. We know that. Milk in Ireland, unlike in other European countries, is produced off grass. There is a significant amount of carbon sequestration going on through the production of that milk. If we were to produce all of the milk for Europe, that would be a good thing and not a bad thing. We can produce milk in Ireland with the least amount of carbon emissions per litre of milk, the lowest number of kilos of carbon. I think it is slightly over 1 kg, if I am not mistaken, and there is a drive to get it under 1 kg. We can do that, so that is a good thing.

On whether we are going to eat beef, I have a vested interest as I am a beef producer, but I like to think that I cherish the environment and that I want to pass it on to the next generation, but I get screwed every year by producers. If the Government wants to address the issue, let us produce beef in a way that is least damaging in Europe, because it is not going to stop the consumption of beef in Europe overnight. Let it at least be produced off a grass-based system where there is carbon sequestration rather than in intensive feedlots, which are growing in

popularity in Ireland and are the dominant way of producing beef in other European states. The Bill does nothing to address that.

I appreciate that may not be the Minister's area of expertise and may not be the background from whence he came. It may not be representative of those who he represents in this House. That is why I come back to the messianic approach, that he has all the answers and none of us have any answers, because that is not what deliberative democracy is about. That is not what we were elected to do. I often wonder about the idea of a citizens' assembly and that we need one to solve this, that and the other problem. We have a citizens' assembly. There are 160 ordinary people in this House. If anybody in Clare does not like me representing them, he or she can run for election. Any such person will have the same chance and prospects as I had, particularly as an independent. Regardless of that, you can join a party if that is what rows your boat and submit to a three-line whip so that you will have to vote for a Minister's messianic approach to something.

I do not mean to sound negative because I applaud what the Minister is about. We need to challenge the climate crisis and the amount of plastics used. How many hundreds of millions of euro of junk plastic did we import from China, along with a virus? Of course, you could not say that six months ago because it was censored by the media in Ireland but now that Joe Biden has said it is okay to suspect it, we can all talk about it. What is it about this single approach? Everybody thinks his or her approach is the correct one and that nobody else's is worth listening to, debating or even acknowledging. The Government would not even think about saying we could sit a week longer. It is not like any of us were leaving the country on holidays last week; heaven forbid. We have plenty of time. We are sitting here in this empty assembly, wasting taxpayers' money because we are not debating key issues. Bills are being rammed through. That is not democracy or debate. If those Bills are challenged in the courts there will be a presumption that they were debated in this House when, in fact, they were not. It is disappointing. I reflected from the ashes of defeat in an election and one of the things I learned was that I had much fewer answers than I thought I had. I do not mean to personalise this but I just do not understand why this legislation is being rammed through, why last week's Bill was rammed through or why we have so much time to debate nonsense. Covid is an unexpected but key issue this Dáil faces yet we could not debate it. This is the issue of our generation and the Government will not allow a debate on it.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: Speaking to this amendment, there has not been a proper impact analysis of what this Bill is actually going to mean for the Irish people, be they involved in farming, tourism, or any other sector of society. We are an island. Take our tourism industry, for instance. I come from the tourism capital of Ireland and, indeed of Europe, and I am proud and glad of the tourism product that has been built up by hoteliers, publicans, restaurateurs and businesspeople in our county who have strived to become masters of their craft. However, the plans contained in this Bill would make us a high-cost destination by increasing on a continuous basis the taxes and charges on aviation fuel. Over many decades there has, thankfully, been a reduction in the cost of flying into this country. I remember only too well how hard it was for people working in England when it came to August, Christmas or St. Patrick's Day weekend because if they wanted to fly to Ireland it cost between £300 and £600 to do so. Under this Bill, we could potentially finish up being a high-cost destination again. We are an island nation. When people come here on holidays they cannot row here in a boat or come on a steamboat. They are going to want to fly into the country and if we make it too expensive for them, they simply will not come to us.

Practical common sense is lacking from this Bill and the Minister is failing to see that. Tonight, he has shown total disdain for each and every one of us who has worked diligently and tirelessly on our amendments. I again thank Deputy Mattie McGrath, the staff who worked with us and the members of our Rural Independent Group who did their best on behalf of the people. I am referring to people like Mr. Kenny Jones, the chairman of Kerry IFA. He is a Kielduff dairy farmer and he came up here today with Ms Mary Fleming and others from the leadership of Kerry IFA. They came here to shout loud and hard on behalf of Kerry IFA and its membership, be they dairy farmers, suckler farmers, sheep farmers or any of the other types of people involved in trying to make a part-time or full-time living from farming. They understand the implications of this Bill and realise that farm incomes are going to be hurt and affected by it, whether that is through the CAP renegotiations or otherwise.

There are so many things wrong with this situation. It is like winning the lotto, where one second this way or that way would have made all the difference. It was just the way the seats fell after the election that meant that the Minister, Deputy Eamon Ryan, was not just in the driving seat but had full control of the motor car, that motor car being the make-up of this Government. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael were so weak and desperate to be in power that it was a case of whatever the Minister wanted, he was going to get it. Indeed, what actually happened with this Bill - speaking again to the amendment - was that what the Minister looked for in the first instance was given back to him and he was allowed to take more out of it. He heard enough people say that it was not going far enough and he knew he had an easy pushover in the Government parties, that they would not rock the boat because they did not want him to shake the foundations of the wall holding up the Government. It was Eamon's way or no one's way. He is running the country at present because the other parties are terrified of him. They are afraid to say anything that would upset him or put him out of kilter because they so desperately need him. Whether he, no more than any of the rest of us, will be there in the future will be for the people to decide but, my God, he will have left a legacy behind him.

I know people who have been pursuing the green agenda for years and it is important to acknowledge that. I am talking about deeply committed and sincere people who were doing this 30 or 35 years ago in places such as Kenmare and Kilgarvan. They are people from whom I learned an awful lot. They were talking about hemp and putting up wind turbines and they could see the problems we were going to have in the future. Those people are still there and I am proud to call many of them my friends. They are genuinely real people who were interested in looking at alternatives. They too could see the need to not impact in an adverse way on farming practices and so on. They would not want a big cull of the national herd, which is what the Minister wants. There are many things the Minister desperately wants but he is very craftily coming around and steering away from them. He knows as well as I do that if we are to achieve what he is looking for with regard to our emissions, a cull of the national herd by this Government is on the cards. It is on the cards in this Bill.

One of the most hurtful things of all is to think that, no matter what happens with future governments or Ministers, at the end of the day we will have this new team of people. I call them the new wise people because they are like the wise men and the wise women. They will be the new NPHEAT and Ministers such as Deputy Ryan will say that this is what they are being told to do by the Climate Change Advisory Council. It is the same as when other Ministers set up groups such as HIQA or when the HSE was established in its present form. These things were done in order that politicians could shift the blame away from themselves and say it was not really them but these other people advising them and telling them what to do. That is wrong.

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My job as a messenger of the people of County Kerry, who were good enough to send me up here, is to speak on their behalf. They are starting to realise what this Bill will mean to them and they realise we are speaking about future generations. Of course we have to protect-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy Healy-Rae. The time is up.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: -----things for future generations but we also have to protect the present people.

An Ceann Comhairle: The time permitted for the debate having expired, I am required to put the following question in accordance with an order of the Dáil of 15 June: “That Fourth Stage is hereby completed and the Bill is hereby passed.”

Amendment put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 61; Níl, 78; Staon, 1.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Staon</i>
<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	<i>Berry, Cathal.</i>	<i>Murphy, Verona.</i>
<i>Brady, John.</i>	<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	
<i>Browne, Martin.</i>	<i>Browne, James.</i>	
<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	
<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	<i>Burke, Colm.</i>	
<i>Carthy, Matt.</i>	<i>Burke, Peter.</i>	
<i>Clarke, Sorca.</i>	<i>Butler, Mary.</i>	
<i>Collins, Joan.</i>	<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>	
<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>	
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>	<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>	
<i>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</i>	<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>	
<i>Cronin, Réada.</i>	<i>Carey, Joe.</i>	
<i>Cullinane, David.</i>	<i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i>	
<i>Doherty, Pearse.</i>	<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>	
<i>Donnelly, Paul.</i>	<i>Collins, Niall.</i>	
<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>	<i>Costello, Patrick.</i>	
<i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i>	<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>	
<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	<i>Creed, Michael.</i>	
<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>	<i>Crowe, Cathal.</i>	
<i>Gannon, Gary.</i>	<i>Devlin, Cormac.</i>	
<i>Gould, Thomas.</i>	<i>Dillon, Alan.</i>	
<i>Guirke, Johnny.</i>	<i>Donnelly, Stephen.</i>	
<i>Harkin, Marian.</i>	<i>Duffy, Francis Noel.</i>	
<i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i>	<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>	
<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>	<i>English, Damien.</i>	
<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>	<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>	
<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>	<i>Feighan, Frankie.</i>	
<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>	<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>	
<i>Kerrane, Claire.</i>	<i>Flaherty, Joe.</i>	

Dáil Éireann

<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>	<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>	
<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>	
<i>McNamara, Michael.</i>	<i>Foley, Norma.</i>	
<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>	<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>	
<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>	<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>	<i>Harris, Simon.</i>	
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>	<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>	
<i>Mythen, Johnny.</i>	<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>	
<i>Nash, Ged.</i>	<i>Higgins, Emer.</i>	
<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>	<i>Hourigan, Neasa.</i>	
<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>	<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>	
<i>O'Callaghan, Cian.</i>	<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>	
<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>	<i>Lahart, John.</i>	
<i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i>	<i>Leddin, Brian.</i>	
<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>	<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>	
<i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i>	<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>	
<i>Ó Ríordáin, Aodhán.</i>	<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>	
<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>	<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>	
<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>	<i>Matthews, Steven.</i>	
<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>	<i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i>	
<i>Ryan, Patricia.</i>	<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>	
<i>Shanahan, Matt.</i>	<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>	
<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>	<i>McGuinness, John.</i>	
<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>	
<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>	<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>	
<i>Smith, Duncan.</i>	<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>	
<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>	<i>Noonan, Malcolm.</i>	
<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>	
<i>Tully, Pauline.</i>	<i>O'Brien, Joe.</i>	
<i>Ward, Mark.</i>	<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>	
<i>Whitmore, Jennifer.</i>	<i>O'Connor, James.</i>	
<i>Wynne, Violet-Anne.</i>	<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>	
	<i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i>	
	<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>	
	<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>	
	<i>O'Gorman, Roderic.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Christopher.</i>	
	<i>O'Sullivan, Pádraig.</i>	
	<i>Ó Cathasaigh, Marc.</i>	
	<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>	
	<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>	
	<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>	
	<i>Richmond, Neale.</i>	

16 June 2021

	<i>Ring, Michael.</i>	
	<i>Ryan, Eamon.</i>	
	<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>	
	<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>	
	<i>Smyth, Ossian.</i>	
	<i>Varadkar, Leo.</i>	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Brendan Griffin and Jack Chambers; Níl, Deputies Carol Nolan and Mattie McGrath.

Deputy Holly Cairns did not vote in this division due to an agreed pairing arrangement with Minister Helen McEntee for the duration of the Minister's maternity leave.

Question declared carried.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Bill will be sent to the Seanad.

Gnó na Dála - Business of Dáil

An Ceann Comhairle: I understand that the Minister for Transport has a business proposal to put to the House.

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I thank the Ceann Comhairle. Prior to introducing this proposal, I thank all our officials who worked tirelessly on the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021. They are a credit to our country.

I move:

10 o'clock That, notwithstanding anything in Standing Orders or the Orders of the Dáil of yesterday, No. 6d, motion re an instruction to the Select Committee on Transport and Communications in relation to the Air Navigation and Transport Bill 2020, be taken now without debate and any division demanded thereon shall be taken immediately, and the weekly division time shall be taken on the conclusion of proceedings on the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Air Navigation and Transport Bill 2020: Instruction to Committee

Minister for Transport (Deputy Eamon Ryan): I move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 187, it be an instruction to the Select Committee on Transport and Communications in relation to the Air Navigation and Transport Bill 2020, that it has power to make amendments to the Bill which are outside the scope of the existing provisions of the Bill, in relation to:

(a) amendments to strengthen the national aviation safety regulatory framework for aviation activities of the Irish Coast Guard (IRCG) and align it with European aviation safety regulations. It is proposed to do this in two ways:

(i) by way of statutory amendments to the Irish Aviation Authority Act 1993 to require that the Irish Aviation Authority consider the public benefit while making regulations specific to the aviation activities of the IRCG; and

(ii) that the Minister may make Regulations to exercise the option in Article 2.6 of Regulation (EU) 2018/1139 (Common Rules in the Field of Civil Aviation) to apply certain elements of the European Regulation to coast guard and search and rescue aviation activities.

(b) to amend the Air Navigation and Transport (Amendment) Act 1998 to increase the Statutory Borrowing Limit of the daa.

Question put and agreed to.

Acquisition of Development Land (Assessment of Compensation) Bill 2021: Second Stage (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Alan Kelly on Wednesday, 16 June 2021: “That the Bill be now read a Second Time.”

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after “That” and substitute the following:

“Dáil Éireann, while acknowledging the relevance of the Acquisition of Development Land (Assessment of Compensation) Bill 2021 in regard to securing more cost efficient development land with the objective that all persons insofar as practicable have good quality and affordable housing appropriate to their needs, in accordance with the principles of social justice and the exigencies of the common good, resolves that the Bill be deemed to be read a second time this day 12 months, to allow sufficient time to consider the work of the Law Reform Commission and finalise proposals currently being formulated by the Government, in line with the Programme for Government commitment.”

- (Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage,

Deputy Malcolm Noonan)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a postponed division relating to Second Stage of the Acquisition of Development Land (Assessment of Compensation) Bill 2021, which took place earlier today. On the question, “That the amendment to the motion be made”, a division was claimed, and in accordance with Standing Order 80(2), that division must be taken now.

Question put:

<i>The Dáil divided: Tá, 129; Níl, 10; Staon, 0.</i>		
<i>Tá</i>	<i>Níl</i>	<i>Stاون</i>
<i>Barry, Mick.</i>	<i>Canney, Seán.</i>	
<i>Berry, Cathal.</i>	<i>Collins, Michael.</i>	
<i>Boyd Barrett, Richard.</i>	<i>Fitzmaurice, Michael.</i>	
<i>Brady, John.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Danny.</i>	
<i>Brophy, Colm.</i>	<i>Healy-Rae, Michael.</i>	
<i>Browne, James.</i>	<i>McGrath, Mattie.</i>	
<i>Browne, Martin.</i>	<i>McNamara, Michael.</i>	
<i>Bruton, Richard.</i>	<i>Murphy, Verona.</i>	
<i>Buckley, Pat.</i>	<i>Nolan, Carol.</i>	
<i>Burke, Colm.</i>	<i>Tóibín, Peadar.</i>	
<i>Burke, Peter.</i>		
<i>Butler, Mary.</i>		
<i>Byrne, Thomas.</i>		
<i>Cahill, Jackie.</i>		
<i>Calleary, Dara.</i>		
<i>Cannon, Ciarán.</i>		
<i>Carey, Joe.</i>		
<i>Carroll MacNeill, Jennifer.</i>		
<i>Carthy, Matt.</i>		
<i>Chambers, Jack.</i>		
<i>Clarke, Sorca.</i>		
<i>Collins, Joan.</i>		
<i>Collins, Niall.</i>		
<i>Connolly, Catherine.</i>		
<i>Conway-Walsh, Rose.</i>		
<i>Costello, Patrick.</i>		
<i>Cowen, Barry.</i>		
<i>Creed, Michael.</i>		
<i>Cronin, Réada.</i>		
<i>Crowe, Cathal.</i>		
<i>Cullinane, David.</i>		
<i>Devlin, Cormac.</i>		
<i>Dillon, Alan.</i>		
<i>Donnelly, Paul.</i>		

<i>Donnelly, Stephen.</i>		
<i>Duffy, Francis Noel.</i>		
<i>Durkan, Bernard J.</i>		
<i>Ellis, Dessie.</i>		
<i>English, Damien.</i>		
<i>Farrell, Alan.</i>		
<i>Farrell, Mairéad.</i>		
<i>Feighan, Frankie.</i>		
<i>Fitzpatrick, Peter.</i>		
<i>Flaherty, Joe.</i>		
<i>Flanagan, Charles.</i>		
<i>Fleming, Sean.</i>		
<i>Foley, Norma.</i>		
<i>Funchion, Kathleen.</i>		
<i>Gannon, Gary.</i>		
<i>Gould, Thomas.</i>		
<i>Grealish, Noel.</i>		
<i>Griffin, Brendan.</i>		
<i>Guirke, Johnny.</i>		
<i>Harkin, Marian.</i>		
<i>Harris, Simon.</i>		
<i>Haughey, Seán.</i>		
<i>Heydon, Martin.</i>		
<i>Higgins, Emer.</i>		
<i>Hourigan, Neasa.</i>		
<i>Howlin, Brendan.</i>		
<i>Humphreys, Heather.</i>		
<i>Kehoe, Paul.</i>		
<i>Kelly, Alan.</i>		
<i>Kenny, Gino.</i>		
<i>Kerrane, Claire.</i>		
<i>Lahart, John.</i>		
<i>Lawless, James.</i>		
<i>Leddin, Brian.</i>		
<i>Lowry, Michael.</i>		
<i>Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.</i>		
<i>MacSharry, Marc.</i>		
<i>Madigan, Josepha.</i>		
<i>Martin, Catherine.</i>		
<i>Matthews, Steven.</i>		
<i>McAuliffe, Paul.</i>		
<i>McConalogue, Charlie.</i>		
<i>McGrath, Michael.</i>		

<i>McGuinness, John.</i>		
<i>Mitchell, Denise.</i>		
<i>Moynihan, Aindrias.</i>		
<i>Moynihan, Michael.</i>		
<i>Munster, Imelda.</i>		
<i>Murphy, Catherine.</i>		
<i>Murphy, Paul.</i>		
<i>Mythen, Johnny.</i>		
<i>Nash, Ged.</i>		
<i>Naughten, Denis.</i>		
<i>Naughton, Hildegarde.</i>		
<i>Noonan, Malcolm.</i>		
<i>O'Brien, Darragh.</i>		
<i>O'Brien, Joe.</i>		
<i>O'Callaghan, Cian.</i>		
<i>O'Callaghan, Jim.</i>		
<i>O'Connor, James.</i>		
<i>O'Dea, Willie.</i>		
<i>O'Donnell, Kieran.</i>		
<i>O'Donovan, Patrick.</i>		
<i>O'Dowd, Fergus.</i>		
<i>O'Gorman, Roderic.</i>		
<i>O'Reilly, Louise.</i>		
<i>O'Rourke, Darren.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Christopher.</i>		
<i>O'Sullivan, Pádraig.</i>		
<i>Ó Broin, Eoin.</i>		
<i>Ó Cathasaigh, Marc.</i>		
<i>Ó Cuív, Éamon.</i>		
<i>Ó Murchú, Ruairí.</i>		
<i>Ó Ríordáin, Aodhán.</i>		
<i>Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.</i>		
<i>Phelan, John Paul.</i>		
<i>Pringle, Thomas.</i>		
<i>Quinlivan, Maurice.</i>		
<i>Rabbitte, Anne.</i>		
<i>Richmond, Neale.</i>		
<i>Ring, Michael.</i>		
<i>Ryan, Eamon.</i>		
<i>Ryan, Patricia.</i>		
<i>Sherlock, Sean.</i>		
<i>Shortall, Róisín.</i>		
<i>Smith, Brendan.</i>		

Dáil Éireann

<i>Smith, Bríd.</i>		
<i>Smith, Duncan.</i>		
<i>Smyth, Niamh.</i>		
<i>Smyth, Ossian.</i>		
<i>Stanley, Brian.</i>		
<i>Tully, Pauline.</i>		
<i>Ward, Mark.</i>		
<i>Whitmore, Jennifer.</i>		
<i>Wynne, Violet-Anne.</i>		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Brendan Griffin and Jack Chambers; Níl, Deputies Alan Kelly and Duncan Smith.

Deputy Holly Cairns did not vote in this division due to an agreed pairing arrangement with Minister Helen McEntee for the duration of the Minister's maternity leave.

Amendment declared carried.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

The Dáil adjourned at 10.13 p.m. until 9 a.m. on Thursday, 17 June 2021.