

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM EALAÍONA, OIÐHREACHT, GNÓTHAÍ RÉIGIÚNACHA, TUAITHE AGUS GAELTACHTA

JOINT COMMITTEE ON ARTS, HERITAGE, REGIONAL, RURAL AND GAEL- TACHT AFFAIRS

Dé Céadaoin, 14 Nollaig 2016

Wednesday, 14 December 2016

The Joint Committee met at 2.15 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Ciarán Cannon,	Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell.
Deputy Michael Collins,	
Deputy Martin Heydon,	
Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív,	

In attendance: Deputies Catherine Connolly and Noel Grealish and Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh.

DEPUTY PEADAR TÓIBÍN IN THE CHAIR.

BUSINESS OF JOINT COMMITTEE

Business of Joint Committee

Chairman: Iarraim ar dhaoine a ngutháin a mhúchadh mar cuireann siad isteach ar an gcóras fuaimhe. Tá leithscéal faighte againn ón Teachta Niamh Smyth.

The joint committee went into private session at 2.20 p.m. and resumed in public session at 2.35 p.m.

Ferry Services to Inis Mór: Discussion

Chairman: Cuirim fáilte roimh Mr. Joe Byrne, leas-chathaoirleach, Mr. Kevin Kelly, príomhfheidhmeannach, Mr. Kevin Finn, innealtóir sinsearach feidhmiúcháin, Mr. Robert Meehan, gníomhaire dlí, agus Ms Nuala Heffernan, oifigeach riaracháin, ar son Chomhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe, agus roimh Ms Cathy Ní Ghóill agus an tUasal Micheál Ó Cualáin ó Chomhar-chumann Forbartha Árainn agus Comhar na nOileán, an tUasal Enda Ó Conghaile ó Chomhar Chaomhán agus Comhar na nOileán agus Mr. Simon Murray ó Chomhar na nOileán. Tá céad fáilte rompu.

Ba mhaith liom na finnétithe a chur ar a n-aird go bhfuil, de bhua alt 17(2)(1) den Acht um Chlúmhilleadh 2009, finnétithe faoi chosaint ag lán-phribhléid maidir leis an bhfianaise a thugann siad don choiste seo. Má ordaíonn an coiste do na finnétithe ámh éirí as fianaise a thabhairt i leith ní áirithe agus má leanann siad dá thabhairt, níl siad i dteideal tar éis sin ach pribhléid cháilithe i leith na fianaise acu. Ordaítear dóibh nach dtabharfar ach fianaise a bhaineann le hábhar na n-imeachtaí seo agus fiafraítear dóibh cleachtadh parlaiminte a urraimiú nach chóir, más féidir, daoine ná eintiteas a cháineadh ná líomhaintí a dhéanamh ina n-aghaidh, ina ainm, ina hainm nó ina n-ainmneacha ar shlí ar bhféadfaí iad a aithint. Ba mhaith liom iad a chur ar an eolas go ndéanfar na ráiteas tionscnaimh a chur siad faoi bhráid an choiste a fhoilsiú ar shuíomh ghréasáin an choiste tar éis an chruinnithe seo. Meabhraítear do chomhaltaí an cleachtadh parlaiminte atá ann le fada nár chóir dóibh tuairimí a thabhairt maidir le duine atá taobh amuigh de na Tithe nó leis na hoifigigh ina ainm nó ina hainm nó ar shlí ina bhféadfaí é nó í a aithint.

Iarraim anois ar aíonna Chomhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe labhairt linn.

Mr. Kevin Kelly: I thank the committee for the opportunity to address it. I am the interim chief executive of Galway County Council. I am joined by Councillor Joe Byrne, leas-cathaoirleach of Galway County Council, Mr. Robert Meehan, law agent, Mr. Kevin Finn, senior executive engineer, and Ms Nuala Heffernan, administrative officer.

Members will be aware that ferry service to Inis Mór is a privately-operated ferry service currently undertaken on a year-round basis by Island Ferries Teoranta, with other ferry service operators operating during the tourist season. The Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs has a role in ensuring the provision of ferry services to all of the islands. It is understood that the Department operates a State-subsidised service contract to two of the Aran Islands for the purpose of maintaining a regular, all-year-round ferry service. It appears that there is no State-subsidised contract in place in respect of Inis Mór. While the service may be of questionable commercial viability in the winter months, it is considered to be a viable route on a year-round basis. The current ferry service operator to Inis Mór is a private entity and, therefore, is not under contract to provide a regular service and is free to cease the service provided by it at any time as a commercial decision.

Galway County Council has no role in the provision of ferry services to the islands, other than being responsible for Cill Rónáin harbour. More recently, it has had an indirect association arising from the introduction of by-laws to provide for the management and maintenance of a new harbour facility at Cill Rónáin. The previous facilities operated in an extremely hazardous and dangerous manner. All activities including shipment of goods, livestock, vehicles, plant and machinery, building and construction supplies and activities associated with fishing vessels, together with the arrival of up to 200,000 passengers per year, took place on the existing harbour which was completely inadequate to deal with the type and level of activity. The requirement for a new harbour was identified to address the various safety issues, safeguard the island's significant tourism sector and secure the sustainable development of Inis Mór. The contract for the construction of a new harbour development was signed on 17 December 2007, works commenced in early 2008 and substantial completion was confirmed by November 2011. The harbour remained open throughout this period and the final cost of the project was approximately €48 million. It was considered necessary to introduce by-laws in order to regulate and control activities at the harbour, including collecting charges for the purpose of managing the harbour and its facilities especially with there being in excess of 200,000 passengers disembarking and using the facility annually. Approximately eight passenger vessels operate during the busy tourist season. Some of them undertake multiple trips each day depending on the demand. In the case of those vessels, a charge per passenger per entry of 80 cent, with a multi-user charge for those using the service more than five times per annum, applies. Those in that category, including island residents, are required to pay €5 per annum. The approach of the council was that the charges collected from the users of Cill Rónáin Harbour would be used to pay for a portion of the annual costs associated with the management and maintenance of the harbour.

Galway County Council has a full-time harbour master who is assisted by other outdoor staff to manage the facility to ensure it is safe and orderly for all harbour users and most important to guarantee that the harbour will not return to what was an unacceptable and dangerous location in the past. There is a cost associated with providing this service which must be funded and a payment to be made by the users of the facilities is a means of part funding this cost.

The consideration and adoption of the by-laws is a reserved function of the councillors and the draft by-laws were debated extensively at meetings of the Connemara electoral area committee and subsequently considered by the roads and transportation strategic policy committee. Ultimately, the public submissions were considered and the by-laws were adopted by full council. This process occurred between September 2010 and October 2011 when several amendments were made to the by-laws, including a reduction in the fee per passenger from €1.20 to 80 cent and the modification of the charge for residents of the island and frequent travellers to €5 per annum. Following the adoption of the by-laws, Island Ferries Teo, IFT, was successful in being granted leave to apply for a judicial review which was heard over 11 days in the High Court and at which both parties gave detailed evidence.

Galway County Council successfully defended the case in the High Court and IFT then appealed the case to the Supreme Court. Given that all of the issues involved in respect of the council's actions in bringing forward and adopting these by-laws were fully considered by the High Court and Supreme Court, which both found in favour of Galway County Council. I have provided, for ease of reference, copies of the judgments in those two cases. The Supreme Court stated that there is nothing in the judgment of the trial judge in the High Court to suggest that what he characterised as a "modest charge" could not be passed on to passengers. It was considered that the levying of a fee based on passenger numbers is not characteristic of a tax

but a standard method of charging for use. The court found that “Galway County Council set the charges for Cill Rónáin through a process of debate and analysis within the scope of their delegated governmental function.” The Supreme Court agreed with the High Court trial judge who found the value of the facility to be considerable and that the imposition of the charge involved no serious additional burden in terms of the counting of numbers to Island Ferries, is a reasonable means of charging and, is no more than the fixing of “a very modest per capita fee of €0.80 on individual passengers arriving most of whom will make the trip only once”. The use of multiple tickets, and a reasonable charge in that regard, protects the interests of islanders who, given their isolation from many other State services, are entitled to some compensatory benefit in the eyes of the court. It was found that the charges on visitors using the harbour are both modest and reasonable and that Galway County Council had ample statutory basis for imposing the charge and for doing so in the manner in which it did. The Supreme Court found that there was no basis upon which any of the appeal grounds could succeed.

There has been significant discourse on the operation and maintenance costs of Cill Rónáin Harbour and these costs, which were only estimates at the time, were outlined during the discussions as being between €150,000 and €200,000 per annum. This issue was raised in court where further detail was outlined in terms of the cost, particularly in 2012, which was presented as €176,600. Using the same approach for the period 2012–2015, the annual costs are between €118,400 and €204,420. Any moneys derived from the passenger would equate to only a portion of those costs. Other costs that must be met include indirect payroll costs, foreshore licence and ongoing maintenance which will be significant given the harsh coastal environment which will cause rapid wear on the facilities such as public lighting, navigational lighting, CCTV network, safety ladders, railings and so on. It was intended to establish a sinking fund to provide for the replacement of those items in due course in the absence of any other funding arrangement. There will also be a requirement at intervals for the maintenance dredging of ferry berths 1 and 2 due to the proximity of the Cill Rónáin beach. The total for all of the costs including indirect costs and the sinking fund requirements each year could be in the range of €192,300 to €269,000. That is based on figures derived between 2012 to 2015.

Following the decision of the Supreme Court in December 2015 Island Ferries Teo announced that it was going to withdraw its winter service on 16 January 2016, apparently with the intention that the service would resume at a later date in the context of the commencement of the tourist season. The council met with representatives of Island Ferries Teo and Comhar-chumann Forbartha Arann as well as the Department immediately before and after Christmas 2015. In January last, Island Ferries Teo agreed to make a payment per vessel on a per entry, per month or per annum basis, depending on the usage of the vessel but the total estimate for the amount that would accrue in those scenarios was very small. Following all those discussions, the cessation of the service did not occur at that time. Between June and October of this year, as chief executive of Galway County Council, I met a representative of Island Ferries Teo on two occasions during which the resistance to the by-laws was still voiced and the offer of a payment based on each vessel remained the desired approach from the company’s perspective, at a much lower rate than might accrue under the by-laws. In October, the company put forward a written proposal, one of the main changes being a reduction of the fee per passenger to 40 cent from 80 cent. As I have outlined, the fee had already been reduced by the council from €1.20 to 80 cent. It was suggested that the higher fee would be financially unviable for the company. This proposal was discussed at a meeting of the corporate policy group of Galway County Council in early November where it was not considered favourably.

At a meeting of Galway County Council on 24 October 2016, the members unanimously

agreed that “Galway County Council would request that the Department would implement a PSO Service to Inis Mór so as to give certainty of services to the Islanders.” At a subsequent meeting of Galway County Council on 23 November 2016, following the withdrawal of the ferry service by Island Ferries Teo, the members mandated the chief executive to engage in further discussions with Island Ferries Teo and the Department of Arts, Heritage, Rural, Regional and Gaeltacht Affairs. These discussions were to be held in the context of the company’s assertion that a fee of 80 cent would impact on the commercial viability of the operation while the approach was not to impact on the integrity of the by-laws. These discussions have commenced, are continuing and have made progress. The discussions are mainly of a financial nature, including consideration of the fee per passenger, the arrears of fees due from the company since 2012, the substantial court costs which remain outstanding and the methodology for collating and agreeing passenger numbers in the future.

The adoption and implementation of the by-laws has been fully examined by the Courts and upheld. The by-laws in question were adopted following extensive public consultation and careful consideration of the various issues raised, and it has always been expected that the operator could pass on the charge to the passenger but has chosen not to do so at the present time. Island Ferries Teo now accepts the by-laws and the discussions centre on the financial aspects that arise. The principles and procedures involved have been fully considered by the courts and found to withstand detailed scrutiny. The current by-laws and method of calculating the charges have been found to be entirely legal and within the powers and competence of the council. The council remains committed to the current discussions relating to the outstanding financial matters. Those discussions are ongoing.

Chairman: Míle buíochas as sin. Anois iarraim ar an toscaireacht ó Chomhar na nOileán labhairt linn.

Ms Cathy Ní Ghóill: Beidh triúr againn ag caint agus táimid chun dul abhuis is abhus. Déanfaidh mé i mBéarla agus i nGaeilge é. Táimse anseo ar son comharchumann forbartha Inis Mór. We thank the Chairman and members for the opportunity to appear before the joint committee. It is exciting and daunting to come to the Oireachtas. I am joined by the school principal of Coláiste Naomh Eoin from Inis Mór because we want to tie in education and Mr. Simon Murray, the Chairperson of Islands Federation of Ireland. We are interlinked on the issue of the Inis Mór ferry service. We have provided the committee with our opening statement, but I am not going to read it. I will speak from the heart.

We travelled across the Wild Atlantic Way. We were lucky enough to get across on the ferry, a service which has been in danger for a number of weeks. We are blessed to live in such a wonderful place as Inis Mór, which is part of the Aran Islands. We appreciate the culture and the heritage of our island. One makes a decision to live on an island. Rural living can be difficult, but living on an island is even more difficult and challenging. As an islander born and bred, when I made the decision to move back to Inis Mór, one of the many factors involved was the availability of services and access facilities. I suffer from sea sickness so it is not great to live on an island when that is the case. The fact that services had improved greatly since I was a child was a major factor in my decision to move home. We had both an excellent air and boat service, which had improved in the course of time. One makes a decision to move to or remain on an island based on many factors. Unfortunately, in the past four years this has become more challenging. The reason I go back four years is that I will deal with both the air service and the ferry service.

Members may have seen or heard us on the media because we have been battling to keep

basic services going. Our air service was nearly cut back. It all stems from the failure to listen to the views of the islanders. There is an ongoing issue with the ferry service because no Government contract was put in place by Roinn na Gaeltachta. The previous speaker, Mr. Kevin Kelly, touched on that point. The ferry company does not want a Government contract, but the islanders want a Government contract to ensure that a service continues all year round.

In 2011, Galway County Council decided to introduce by-laws for Kilronan Harbour. A significant amount of money has been spent on Kilronan Harbour, a development that was badly needed and was between 50 and 60 years overdue. Galway County Council was the project co-ordinator as the owner of the pier, but the work was the result of the effort of people from the bottom up, the people of Inis Mór. The fishermen and the people knew that the harbour was an absolute danger and that we, the islanders needed a sheltered harbour. We lobbied for 15 years and Deputy Ó Cuív knows because we had his ears reddened begging for the funding of infrastructure, which we got from Galway County Council and Roinn na Gaeltachta. We were delighted to get it. We feel that it was great to get the development and it has been worth every cent in our opinion, but I do not think we should have been penalised for that development. We never agreed in principle with levies. We agree there are running costs and that there should have been some other form of charge, but we did not agree with the levies. We verbalised that vocally as my friends in the council know and we were outside protesting and talking to politicians about it. We as islanders believe it stems from not being listened to. If the councillors had listened to us from 2011, I do not think we would be in the mess we are today. As Mr. Kelly stated, the case went to the High Court and there have been costs, including the cost of appeals. All of this has been hanging over the people of Inis Mór, who do not know if they will have a service the following week.

We did not agree with the levies. There was a vote in Galway County Council and democracy won through. While I am totally in favour of democracy, sometimes it does not work and in this case, I do not think it worked. The people who use and understand the service were not listened to and that was the inhabitants of the island. We are sick of battling to keep basic services that we should have. I would say the politicians are tired of us calling meetings and begging for help and assistance. That is wrong. We want a ferry service. We are aware of the factors. The company, Island Ferries, runs an excellent service but it is a private company that can do what it likes when it likes. This is why we want a Government contract to be put in place and that is what we will be looking for going forward.

The issue of levies created a problem. The company made public the difficulties with running costs in the winter time but the end result is that the islanders face the possibility of no service from 1 December to March. We did not know when the ferry pulled out on 1 December whether it would be back until March. If we had not fought to keep our air service, that would have been gone and we would have been totally stranded.

We are grateful for the opportunity to come before the committee today. I think it is counterproductive to spend this time blaming and pointing fingers at others. We hope that our views will be listened to. After Mr Ó Cualain's contribution, Mr. Simon Murray will speak on policy issues and the need for a policy for islands. We have seen the impact of what is lacking on islands for the past four or five years. We have raised the issues but we are not being listened to and basic services are being pulled. We accept there are costs associated with the pier, but we felt there were other ways to cover them, be it a price based on the tonnage per vessel. In our campaign against the levies at the time, our banner headline was "Penalised for being islanders". That is what we felt.

There is great talk about the Wild Atlantic Way, and we are on the Wild Atlantic Way. Dún Aengus is listed in the Top Ten Ocean Views in the world by National Geographic. That is significant. The views are amazing and we live in an amazing place, but at the end of the day it is the people who make a place. If we do not have a vibrant community, with the population increasing, then the Aran Islands are in trouble and Inis Mór is the largest populated island on the coast of Ireland. The population is dropping as it is on all islands. Our fear is that it is difficult to encourage people to return to the islands. I have relatives who were considering coming back from overseas and they are now saying there might not be a plane or a boat service. That is hanging over us.

We need a change of policy. We are discussing the levy today, but something has to change and our views must be listened to as we should not be in this position. We should not have to come to fight and beg for the right to travel. We have a right to the right of travel within our country. We need a ferry to get from A to B. A ferry operator should not be penalised for providing a good service. Costs need to be covered but I think there are other ways to deal with that. If our views had been listened to four years ago, there would not have been the court cases with related accumulating costs. We also would not be living with the stress of not knowing if we would be able to go from Inis Mór to the mainland on a given day.

Ar an bpointe sin, críochnóidh mé mo spiel. Tá a fhios agam go bhfuil an tUasal Ó Cualáin ag iarraidh teacht isteach ar an taobh oideachais dó. Education is interlinked. It is like a dominoes effect, if one goes, they all tumble. For us access and infrastructure is a significant factor to living on an island.

Chairman: An bhfuil an tUasal Ó Cualáin ag iarraidh a labhairt?

Mr. Micheál Ó Cualáin: Is iontach an seans a fháil ár gcás a chuir os comhair an choiste agus éisteacht a fháil faoi na dúshláin atá againn ar oileán agus ar chónaí ar oileán. Is dócha nár thuig mé féin na dúshláin a bhaineann le cónaí ar oileán go dtí 1988 agus go ndeachaigh mé ag cónaí ar oileán agus gur shocraigh mé síos i mo mhúinteoir ansin. Mar mhúinteoir bhí na dúshláin amach romham dochreidte i gcomparáid le múineadh ar an mórthír. Mar phríomhoide scoile i gColáiste Naomh Éanna anois, tá na dúshláin sin dúbailte. Ní hé amháin go bhfuil orm cuimhneamh ar gasúir na scoile, tá orm cuimhneamh ar mhúinteoirí agus ar chlanna agus tá orainn cuimhneamh mar ghrúpa ar cá bhfuilimid ag dul. An bhfuil daoine ag dul a bheith ag cónaí ar na hoileáin nó an bhfuilimid ag dul dearmad a dhéanamh ar na hoileáin? Mar a dúirt Cathy Ní Ghóill, is álainn go deo iad na hoileáin, ach ní beo aon áit gan daoine. Tá faitíos orm go bhfuilimid tagtha ag crosbhóthar agus nach mór dúinne, ní fiú mar oileánaigh, ach mar náisiún, breathnú ar na hoileáin agus ceist a chur orainn féin an bhfuilimid sásta an costas a bhaineann le daoine a choinneáil ar na hoileáin a íoc. An bhfuilimid sásta go mbeidh daoine ag cónaí ar ár gcuid oileán, nó an bhfuilimid chun iad a iompú isteach ina n-áiteanna ar nós na Blascaodaí, a mbeimid in ann cuairt a thabhairt orthu ach gan aon daoine i gcónaí ann?

Tá sé ceart go leor teacht anseo go dtí an coiste le dúshláin. Tá dúshláin ann agus is dúshlán oideachais atá mise chun labhairt faoi. Ní rachaidh mé níos faide le haon dúshlán eile. Tuigim go maith na dúshláin oideachais sin. Caithfidh go dtuigim iad mar tá siad scríofa os mo chomhair, ach rinne mé dearmad ar mo spéaclaí agus dá bharr níl in ann iad a léamh amach don choiste. Tuigim go maith iad. Tuigim gurb é ceann de rudaí is tábhachtaí dúinne ná go mbeadh seirbhís cheart fharantóireacha agus seirbhís eitilte ag freastal ar na hoileáin.

Maidir leis an oideachas, tá múinteoirí i gcónaí ag taisteal amach is isteach ó na hoileáin. Tá múinteoirí ón mórthír ag múineadh ar na hoileáin. Tá clann ag cuid acu sin ar an mórthír.

Bíonn orthu an clann sin a fhágáil ar feadh cúpla lá sa tseachtain. Is cruatan ann fhéin é sin, ach tá siad sásta cur suas leis fad is go bhfuil seirbhís ann. Tá muintir na n-oileán sásta a gcuid gásúr a chur chuig na scoileanna ar na hoileáin fad is go bhfuil seirbhísí farantóireachta nó eitilte ann agus go bhfuil scoláirí in ann taisteal chuig imeachtaí, ócáidí spóirt, coláistí agus ag na gnáthrudáí a dhéanann chuile scoláire eile ar an mórthír. Ba chóir go mbeadh muid in ann teacht ar na rudaí sin. Tá sé fíor-thábhachtach dúinn má tá scoileanna le bheith ar na hoileáin go mbeidh seirbhís farantóireachta agus seirbhís eitleáin againn agus nach dtógfar uainn é. Má thógfar, is é sin deireadh na scoileanna agus deireadh chroílár na n-oileán. Má tharlaíonn sin, ní fada nach mbeidh daoine ina gcónaí ar na hoileáin. Is é sin mo chéad phointe.

Ó thaobh riachtanais scoile go sonrach, d'fhéadfadh muid a rá go bhfuil dúshláin go leor ann, ar nós an leithroinnt múinteoirí a thugtar dúinn, an múnla ina ndéantar dáileadh ar mhúinteoirí agus an cóimheas de 19 scolaire in aghaidh aon mhúinteoir amháin. Le bheith réalaíoch faoi, níl seans na ngrást go n-oibríonn sé sin ar scoileanna oileáin. Tá scoileanna oileáin beag. Ná bíodh aon bhréag faoi sin. Ní bheidh daonra mór millteach againn riamh. Dá bhrí sin, níl an cóimheas sin chun obair ar scoileanna oileáin. Teastaíonn córas nua agus caithfear breathnú go géar ar sin.

Mar a deirim, tá sé an-dheacair múinteoirí a earcú chuig na hoileáin. Tá sé sin ag éirí níos deacra i gcónaí. Gearradh an liúntas oileáin cúpla bliain ó shin agus ceapaim go dteastaíonn é a thabhairt ar ais. Tháinig mise go dtí an coiste chun na dúshláin a bhaineann le scoil oileáin a rith a léiriú. Freisin, tá mé tagtha chun freagra a thabhairt don choiste. Tá sé scríofa agam agus beidh mé sásta é a roinnt leis an gcoiste ina dhiaidh an chruinnithe.

Maidir le cothabháil scoile, má tá scoil ar oileán agus tá innealtóir, leictreoir, léachtóir nó aon duine le fáil acu ar feadh lá amháin, tá costas breise ag baint leis. Ní féidir le hinnealtóir teacht agus caoi a chur ar mheaisín nó rud éigin sa scoil agus imeacht arís. Caithfidh sé nó sí teacht ar maidin ar an mbád farantóireachta nó ar eitleán agus fanacht an lá iomlán go dtí gur féidir leis nó léi imeacht arís. Tá rudaí bunúsacha cosúil le ola, leictreachas agus cothabháil na scoile níos costasaí ná mar atá sé ar an mórthír. Ní cheapaim go bhfuil sé seo tuigte ag an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna. Ní mór don Roinn breathnú ar na scoileanna oileáin.

Níl ach cúig scoil iarbhuoideachais ar oileáin amach ó chósta na hÉireann. Tá trí cinn acu sin faoi Bhord Oideachais agus Oiliúna Ghaillimh agus Ros Comáin. Tá an péire eile faoi Bhord Oideachais agus Oiliúna Dhún na nGall. Mar a deirim, táimid ag plé le seo le píosa fada agus ceapaimid go bhfuil freagra againn ar an gceist, freagra nach gcosnódh mórán airgid agus a bheadh teoranta do na hoileáin. Ní gá go mbeadh sé seo in ann do na scoileanna beaga ar fad nó do na scoileanna ar fad sa tír. Tá an freagra seo le haghaidh scoileanna na n-oileán amháin. An rud atá uainn ná 2.5 múinteoir ex-quota, in áit an mhúinteoir amháin ex-quota atá ann faoi láthair. Chosnódh sé €327,000. Táimid ag iarraidh go dtabharfar an liúntas oileáin ar ais. Leis an ardú sa líon múinteoirí, chosnódh sé sin €13,000. Tá mé in ann na caipéisí seo ar fad a thabhairt don choiste ina dhiaidh na cruinnithe. Táimid ag cuartú €10,000 sa mbreis i gcomparáid le scoileanna mórthíre ar an mbuiséad neamh-phá.

Bhí scéim na bhfoghlaimoírí Gaeilge mar scéim iontach a thug an Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta isteach ag an am. Tá 30 scoláireacht in aghaidh na bliana ceadaithe le haghaidh na scoileanna le Gaeilge a fhoghlaim ar na hoileáin. Is tumoideachas den scoth atá sna scoláireachtaí seo. Níl siad ar nós na Gaeilgeoirí a bhíonn trí sheachtaine sa nGaeltacht ar saoire. Oideachas bliana atá ann. Tá sé thar cinn. Is í ceann de na scéimeanna is fearr a tugadh isteach, chomh fada is a bhaineann sé liomsa, ó bhunú an Stáit. Nílimid ach ag iarraidh dubailt ar sin. Dhéanfadh sé sin fíor-dhifriocht do scoileanna oileáin. Mhéadódh sé an daonra sna

scoileanna. Ceapaim gur rud simplí é agus rud a theastaíonn go géar.

Níl an costas iomlán a fheiceann muid ach €540,000. Dhéanfadh sé sin cinnte go mbeadh scoileanna beo ar chúig oileáin na tíre. Má tá na scoileanna beo, tá an pobal beo. Bheadh in-mharthanacht ann. Bheadh muid beo agus bheadh cinnteacht ag muintir na n-oileán agus ag óige na n-oileán. Teastaíonn sé sin go géar. Ceapaim go bhfuil dúshlán ar an Rialtas agus ar gach polaiteoir breathnú go cruinn agus gníomh a dhéanamh ar an gceist seo. Stopfaidh mé ansin.

Chairman: Gabhaim buíochas leis an bhfinné. Bhí sé sin an-shuimiúil ar fad. Tugaim cuireadh do Simon Murray labhairt anois.

Mr. Simon Murray: I wish to cover the issue in the overall context of the collective, which is Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann, the federation for the offshore islands. I will start with a very simple question. How many people in this room can name a depopulated island? I am sure everybody can think of one, two, three or maybe four. How many of those have been repopulated? The answer is none. That is why we are here.

The islands collective is facing an uncertain future. It is being phrased in the media as “death by a thousand cuts”, and that is not too far off the mark. Sometimes they are little things and sometimes they are huge things. They relate to education, health, arts, culture, heritage, fishing, farming and all aspects. Small things can sometimes go an awfully long way in small island populations. We are under 3,000 people between all of the islands combined and we are not heading in the right direction. We are effectively trying to hold on to who we are and how we are defined in Irish society. I am not too sure where that lies at the moment. We have been dealing with successive Governments and we still do not have a proper policy from Government level on the organisation and management of our islands that translates from one Government to the next.

With regard to transportation services, we are seeking the infrastructural work that needs to be done on the islands. The operational side of it is the running of the co-operatives and the community development projects across the islands, which are front-line services on behalf of the State on each island. We are seeking a budget of between €12 million and €15 million per year to take care of many of the constant outstanding issues that are ongoing with the islands each day. That would protect what we have just spoken about - the ferry services, the air services and the ones to be developed and the infrastructure that needs to be developed, such as the piers that are still outstanding and which need to be done in the future. If there is a roll-over budget every year, the great work we have done with our partners in the council in the past can continue. However, there cannot be a famine or feast situation, and I am not just talking about the recent past. In the 1990s, the early 2000s and even before that the islands were starved of funding. There was a flash in the pan for eight or nine years in which great work was done, but then we were abandoned again. There must be a consistent approach, at both council and Government levels. The council cannot do it if it does not get the money.

It is not a huge amount of money, but what would it mean? The island way of life would be protected. It is clear from the Dáil records and elsewhere that this State abandoned the islands when the State was needed most. As most of the members know, I live on Inishbofin. Inishark beside it was depopulated in 1960. The next two islands to us are Inishturbot and Inishturk South, which were depopulated in 1978. Our three nearest neighbours are gone. Those islands will never be repopulated. It is a huge issue. It is not just about money but about what we want to do as a nation. Not every country has islands. Many of our European partners in the

European Small Islands Federation value their islands. Scotland pumps a great deal of money into the infrastructure and maintenance of its islands. That is true of France and other countries as well. However, we are discussing our islands. We must take a new and realistic look at the question of whether we want to ensure that our island life continues. There is no point in the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport trumpeting the Wild Atlantic Way and the islands when six other Departments are cutting the legs out from under us. That is what is happening. The case with Inis Mór is a complicated situation but if a proper subsidy had been put in place at the start, would the question have arisen now? I do not believe so. The aeroplane service operating across the three Aran Islands is still in jeopardy. There is no guarantee. The one in Inishbofin never got off the ground, if the committee will excuse the pun. The infrastructure is there and will be there for the next 400 or 500 years. Why can we not get a small budget from somewhere to run the service?

I have been a taxpayer since I was 18 years of age. I own a few companies and they all pay tax. I never complain about my taxes being spent anywhere else in this country, but I would like to see some of them coming back to the islands. We elect a Government for two fundamental reasons. One is the protection of the State internally and externally from a security point of view. The other, which is really contentious now, is the collection and redistribution of tax. A large amount of tax is collected on the islands. If one considers the islands collectively, even from the tourism perspective, they give the State a very large amount of money. We are only seeking our share back to try to maintain the infrastructure, transportation, education, health and essential services we need. We are not asking for a hospital to be built on any of the islands, for example. We are being realistic as we know what can work. The most disappointing aspect of all of this, and Cathy Ní Ghóill touched on it earlier, is that sometimes the last people who are ever asked about anything are the islanders. We have survived on our islands for 5,000 or 6,000 years. We know how to live there, so what about talking to us first to see if something will work before it is implemented from the top down? That is the key principle of sustaining island life. A consistent plan should be put in place so we do not have to keep appearing in the media, as Cathy Ní Ghóill said. It sounds terrible in some cases and people say, "Oh, they are at it again". However, I never complain about my money being pumped into a motorway which I will hardly ever use. There are plenty of them in the country on which I have never driven. I would like to see some of my money coming back to sustain our islands.

There must be a consistent annual budget for the islands through the island section in the Department. That would cure many of the problems that are arising on a regular basis. If we reach that point, we will acknowledge that the islands are worth something from the perspective of our culture, arts, heritage, who we are and our history. I believe we are worth that.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Is maith go bhfuil an plé seo ar bun. I understand that negotiations are taking place and that it would not be appropriate to go into the details of the negotiations, but it is important to lay down a few basic markers which should guide the Oireachtas, the Government and the local authority. We must consider this not from the view of any company or authority but from the viewpoint of the need to sustain our islands. It is a clear Government policy and every party has stated that it wishes to sustain the islands. Fundamental to that is the need to provide a good transport service to every island at a fair cost. When I was appointed a Minister I set about ensuring that. For example, at that time there was no contracted service to any non-Gaeltacht island. I brought it all under a single system to ensure that every island had a good transport service. When I left the Department every island with a significant population of 12, 20 or more had a service and there was a maximum fare for islanders of €8 and €5 for students. That was in recognition of the fact that there is no choice of getting into a car and

driving somewhere - one can only get on or off the island by boat or aeroplane.

My second comment is to the county council. A thing can be legal but still not be right. We must accept that, according to the courts, it is the council's legal right to what it did. I would dispute whether it was right. I dispute whether the council was right or whether the Department was right. The authorities let the islanders down. Why do I think that? It is a charge on the islanders and a charge on transport to the island. Some people might say, "It is a once-off visit at 80 cent so what difference does it make?". First, tourists can be notoriously price sensitive. Second, one would think that the only non-islanders who visit the islands are tourists. However, the washing machine service person and other service personnel go to the islands. The council is charging them the 80 cent. The HSE use it very frequently and its people are being charged the 80 cent. The Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board, GRETB, which runs the schools, use it all of the time, as well as all of the ancillary services that come to the island. Many people, including politicians, go to the islands on a frequent basis. A large amount of business into and out of the islands is not once-off but repetitive. Imagine the outrage if every time somebody from outside Connemara who travelled beyond Moycullen had to pay 80 cent for the pleasure of doing so. It is a cost on the island. Every time one charges or makes it more expensive to do anything on the island there is an impact on the island.

Who should have borne the cost? First, I do not accept all the costs given by the manager or chief executive. The reason is that he has control over many piers in County Galway and he funds those out of the rates, general taxation and all the other money that comes in from the State. Many of those costs would have arisen on any pier he controls, but he does not have levies on those piers. There are extra costs involved in running the pier in Cill Rónáin, and rightly so. I must compliment the county council on radically improving the way that pier is organised. It has been a bumpy road getting there, but most people would say that the islander and tourist experience of landing on the pier is much safer, more organised and better than it was in the past and also that we need a harbour master. However, I believe that the State should have picked up the tab and that this should not have fallen on the islanders. It undermines the principle behind the €8 and €5 I had laid out. I think it is €10 and €6 now since the last Government.

I will raise a few key issues. An féidir le muintir na n-oileán - go mórmhór an bheirt anseo as Inis Mór - a dheimhniú go bhfuil sé de riachtanas, má thagtar ar shocrú an tseachtain seo nó an tseachtain dar gcionn, go mbeadh an táille €10 i gceist do dhaoine fásta agus €6 do gasúr agus scoláirí scoile? An bhfuil an ceart agam go bhfuil sé riachtanach amach is amach go dtiocfadh sé sin i bhfeidhm láithreach in aon shocrú nua agus nach mbeidh sé inghlactha ar chor ar bith, dubh, bán nó riabhach, do mhuintir an oileáin má dhéantar socrú nach bhfuil sé sin mar chuid dó?

Tá ceist agam ar an Uasal Ó Cualáin. Nuair a bhíonn na scoláirí atá ar scoláireacht sa scoil ag dul isteach agus amach, an n-áirítear iad mar oileánaigh don tréimhse scoilbhliana nó an n-áirítear iad mar thurasóirí nó daoine ón taobh amuigh? Bheadh tionchar ollmhór aige sin ar an gcostas atá orthu. Tacaím go hiomlán leis an éileamh atá ag an Uasal Ó Cualáin i dtaobh chúrsaí oideachais. Mar is eol dó, bhí sé mar chuid den pholasáí oileánda a d'fhoilsigh muid ag an toghchán deiridh. Seasann muid leis sin. Ní mór é sin a dhéanamh agus é a dhéanamh go sciobtha.

Finally, I will say to Mr. Simon Murray that one thing I have learned in life is that one cannot forecast the future. We have elections so that Governments can change policies. Sometimes they change them very much for the worse rather than for the better, but that is the choice of the electorate. It is not possible to absolutely insulate oneself from the future. It is important,

however, that there would be a clearly articulated island policy. It is important that the islanders and the people of Ireland know what the various parties stand for when it comes to the islands and that they know whether we are willing to make what is actually, financially, a very modest contribution to ring-fence special things, as we did for example with the car tax on the islands and so on. There were many examples of how it can be done without any significant impact on the national budget. To put it in context, Mr. Ó Cualáin mentioned a cost of €300,000 to put a package together to sort out the secondary education difficulties on the island. The sum of €300,000 out of €58 billion is the equivalent of a family that has a take home salary of €58,000 committing 30 cents a year to something. That is the proportion.

Chairman: Táim ag iarraidh go gcuirfimid go léir ár gcuid ceisteanna ar dtús agus go fanfaidh na finnétithe go dtí an deireadh lena bhfreagraí.

Tá aithne maith agam ar an mBlascaod, Inis Bó Finne sa tuaisceart i nDún na nGall agus ar Inis Airc. Is comharthaí iad na hoileáin sin gur theip an Rialtas ar na hoileáin fadó. Tá siad ar nós reiligí anois. Tá siad an-bhrónach agus bíonn sé chomh uaigneach cuairt a thabairt ar na háiteanna sin agus a bheith ag samhlaigh ar na pobail a bhí ann fadó. Ceapaim go bhfuil sé dochreidte go bhfuil na hoileánaigh ag fulaingt chomh fada is atá siad leis an mbagairt seo os a gcionn. Is rud bunúsach é a bheith ag bogadh amach agus isteach ón oileán agus tá sé dochreidte go bhfuil ar na hoileánaigh an méid troda sin a bheith acu. Nuair a théann daoine go Baile Átha Cliath, ní híocann siad níos mó as an “cé” sa stáisiún traenach. Ní bhíonn an costas sin dírithe ar phobal áirithe eile sa tír.

Cén fáth nár iarr an Rialtas conradh a chruthú leis an gcomhlacht? Cén fáth gur lig an Rialtas an rud seo a shleamhnú? Is é mo thuairmse ná go dtéann an fhadhb ar ais go dtí an pointe faoin Rialtas agus é gan a bheith sásta conradh a bhrú ar na heagraíochtaí.

Tá ceist agam ar thoscáirí Chomhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe. Cé mhéad a chosnaíonn sé an cé a bhainistiú gach bliain? Cé mhéad a chosnaíonn an ceadúnas foreshore? Tá sé deacair a thuiscint go mbíonn ar mhuintir Árann íoc as na rudaí seo, go háirithe an ceadúnas sin, mar tá an t-airgead ag dul ar ais go dtí an Stát i slí éigin eile. Nach bhfuil? Is saghas costas ciorclach atá i gceist, ach fós titeann an costas sin ar ghuailí mhuintir Árann.

Sin é mo chuid. Glaoim ar an Seanadóir Ní Dhomhnaill.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: I thank the Chairman. I was going to allow Senator Ó Clochartaigh speak before I did as he is from the area and I am very new to it, although being new to it, in the sense of not having the privilege to live in that part of the world, can be an advantage. My questions are innocent, but they might be chaotic as well, although they might be interesting. Perhaps Senator Ó Clochartaigh would contribute before me.

Chairman: Glaoim ar an Seanadóir Ó Clochartaigh.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Gabhaim mo bhuíochas leis an Seanadóir agus leis an gCathaoirleach agus cuirim céad fáilte roimh na finnétithe. Is breá an rud é tuilleadh Gaillmhigh a fheiceáil thuas anseo i dTeach Laighean lá breá a bhíonn muid ag obair.

Ní bréag é a rá go bhfuil stair fada idir Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe agus cé Inis Mór. Tá go leor rudaí eile ann agus deireann daoine áirithe liom timpeall ar an rud ar fad go bhfuil beagánín spite feamainne, mar a deirtear i nGaeilge, idir an chomhairle contae agus rudaí atá ag tarlú ar an gcé, go bhfuil drochchaidreamh b'fhéidir idir an chomhairle contae agus na comhlachtaí éagsúla, na hoibrithe bus agus mar sin de ar an gcé agus nach bhfuil sé sin ag cuidiú

leis an gcás. Nílím ag rá go bhfuil sé sin fíor nó bréagach ach bhí standoff áirithe leis an gceist seo a réiteach go dtí an 11ú uair agus gur stop an tseirbhís. Sílim, áfach, go raibh sé brónach gur tharla sé sin agus nárbh fhéidir Roinn na Gaeltachta, muintir na n-oileán, Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe agus Island Ferries suí síos le réiteach a fháil ar an gcás seo agus nach mbeadh gá stop a chur leis an tseirbhís, ach tá muid san áit ina bhfuilimid agus tá roinnt ceisteanna le cur agam.

Luadh costais sa chur i láthair. Bhíodh sé ag cosnú €176,000 in aghaidh na bliana i gcás áirid ó thaobh na figiúirí maidir le riaradh na cé ach tá se sin imithe suas go dtí b'fhéidir €260,000 san fhiúir eile a thug Mr. Kelly níos deireanaí. Sin ardú de €100,000 ar chostas riaradh na cé. Sin ardú uafásach mór. Cuireann daoine an cheist ormsa cá bhfuil an t-airgead sin ag dul. Cé mhéad a raibh sé ag cosaint an tsean-ché a riaradh? Cé mhéad a bhí á chaitheamh ar sin ag Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe? Cén fáth go bhfuil ardú chomh mór ann nuair atá muid ag caint ar píosa iomlán nua infreastruchtúr atá níos fearr? Ba cheart, ar bhealach, go mbeadh sé níos saoire.

Céard iad na h-áiseanna atá le fáil don 200,000 paisinéir seo atá ag teacht ar an gcé? An bhfuil leithreas ann? An bhfuil cithfholcadáin le fáil? An bhfuil foscadh le fáil acu? An bhfuil café ann ar an gcé? Ní dóigh liom go bhfuil ach b'fhéidir go bhfuil mé mícheart. Caitheadh breis is suas le €50 milliún ar an gcé féin. Céard atá le fáil ag an duine atá ag íoc an 80 cent atá ag teacht isteach? Má tá duine ag íoc le dul isteach ar ceann de na marinas ar fud na tíre, tá sé nó sí ag fáil seirbhíse ar an airgead breise sin.

Cén polasaí atá ag Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe maidir leis na hoileáin eile agus levies a bhaint amach ar Inis Oírr, Inis Meáin agus Inis Bó Finne? Níl mé ag iarraidh smaoineamh a chur isteach i gceol na bhfinnéithe go mbeadh levies ann ach an oiread, ach cén polasaí atá ag an gcomhairle ina leith sin? Cén polasaí atá ann sna contaetha eile ar fud na tíre a bhfuil oileáin acu? Céard é an polasaí, mar shampla, atá ag Comhairle Chontae an Chláir? Bíonn báid ag teacht amach go Inis Oírr agus Inis Meáin agus i dTír Chonail agus mar sin de. An bhfuil córas levies acu sin? Cén chaoi a bhfuil an levy go hInis Mór i gcomparáid leis na levies áirithe sin? Tuigim go gcaithfidh Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe breathnú ar costais agus ar airgead agus mar sin de, ach cén chaoi a luíonn sé sin leis an bplean forbartha contae atá ag an gcomhairle maidir le cur chun cinn na hoileáin? Are we biting off our nose to spite our face? An bhfuilimid ag rá i bpolasaí amháin go bhfuilimid ag iarraidh na hoileáin a chur chun cinn, ach ag cur bac ar sin i bpolasaí eile?

Dá dtógfadh Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe droichead in áit éigin in oirthear an chontae ina bhfuil droichead thar abhainn ag teastáil, cén fáth nach mbeadh aon levy i gceist? Níl a leithéid i gceist ar aon cheann de na habhainneacha atá againn sa taobh thoir den chontae, cé go raibh an airgead chaipitil leis na droichid a thógáil faighte ón ciste lárnach. Anois táimid ag caint ar levy a chur ar chéibh atá mar dhroichead, i ndáiríre, do mhuintir Inis Mór. Ní dóigh liom go bhfuil sé sin cothrom. Má tá laghdú tagtha ar an méid airgid a thagann isteach os na levies, cén fáth gur gcaithfear méid ionann a thógáil as ciste bóithre Chonamara? Cén fáth nach dtagann sé amach as an gciste lárnach atá ag an gcomhairle chontae trí chéile?

Tá mé den tuairim le fada go bhfuil gá le comhchoiste iompair do na hoileáin. Tá mé ag rá le fada gur cheart go mbeadh na geallshealbhóirí éagsúla ar na hoileáin - na comhairlí chontae, na comhlachtaí iompair, muintir na n-oileáin agus Roinn na Gaeltachta - páirteach sa chomhchoiste sin leis na ceisteanna seo a phlé ar bhonn leanúnach. An mbeadh na finnéithe sásta glacadh le comhchoiste den tsórt sin? An gcuirfeadh lucht na n-oileáin fáilte roimhe sin? Nuair a d'ardaigh mé an moladh seo leis an Aire Stáit, an Teachta Kyne, le déanaí, dúirt sé nach bhfe-

icfeadh sé deacracht leis. Bhí deacrachtaí ag Airí Stáit roimhe seo leis an moladh seo, le bheith firinneach. An mbeadh fáilte roimh a leithéid de chomhchoiste?

Dúirt iar-Aire Stáit na Gaeltachta, Dinny McGinley, go raibh níos mó airgid á chaitheamh *per capita* ar an gcóras iompair go dtí Oileáin Árann ná go dtí na hoileáin eile. Cén chás a chuirfeadh muintir na n-oileáin ina choinne sin? An aontaíonn siad go bhfuil an iomarca á chaitheamh ar oileáin na Gaillimhe i gcomparáid le oileáin eile ar fud na tíre?

Aontaím go huile agus go hiomlán leis na héilimh atá leagtha amach ag Micheál Ó Cualáin. Mar eolas, tá éisteacht ar an gceist áirithe sin iarraithe againn ón gComhchoiste um Oideachas agus Scileanna sna Tithe seo. Tá súil agam go bhfaighfidh na hoileánaigh cuireadh tar éis an Nollaig leis an gceist shonrach sin a phlé.

Cé mhéad airgid atá caite ag an gcomhairle chontae ar chásanna cúirte agus ar chomhairle dlí i rith an phróisis seo ar fad? Cé mhéad airgid atá caite ag an gcomhairle chontae ar na cásanna atá tógtha i gcoinne na tiománaithe bus a bhíonn ag iarraidh páirceáil ar an gcéibh? An bhfuil an iomarca airgid á chaitheamh ar chásanna cúirte? Bheadh gach duine i bhfad níos fearr as dá mbeadh an t-airgead sin curtha isteach i soláthar na seirbhíse.

Aontaím le formhór den mhéid a bhí le rá ag an Teachta Ó Cuív maidir leis na táillí. Sa cheist seo, caithfidimid aird a thabhairt do thuairimí muintir na n-oileáin agus an dream a thagann isteach iontu agus amach uathu go rialta. Nuair a bhí fadhb ann leis an mbád farantóireachta le déanaí, fuair mé glaoch ó thuismitheoir as Sligeach atá páiste léi ar scoil ar Inis Meáin. Dúirt sí go bhfuil sí thar a bheith sásta leis an scoil agus gach rud atá ann, ach go bhfuil an-ímní uirthi go gcuirfí as don oideachas atá a hiníon ag fáil ar Inis Meáin. Aontaím leis an bpointe gur chóir go mbeadh na táillí de €10 agus €6 aontaithe mar chuid den socrú atá á aontú i láthair na huaire. Tá súil agam go n-éireoidh leis na rannpháirtithe uilig an socrú seo a dhéanamh go luath agus go mbeimid in ann bogadh ar aghaidh ansin agus an comhchoiste iompair seo a chur le chéile le rudaí a shocrú san fhadtéarma.

Chairman: Tá go leor rudaí le smaoinéamh fúthu istigh ansin.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: I had the privilege of living on Inis Meáin at one stage. I was learning Irish as a mature student. I loved it. The witnesses are evoking many memories. I lived on the island for a year. I came away as an islander. I think I looked like an islander. It was a long time ago. I thank the witnesses and I am delighted to meet them. I am approaching this issue with a great innocence in one way, but not in another way.

I agree with Deputy Ó Cuív about the inferences that are made when people speak about rural development. We cannot neglect communities outside the M50. It would be absolutely ridiculous for us to do so. I include the islands in what I am saying.

Why is the State not providing a service to Inis Mór? It is providing a service to Inis Meáin. Can somebody tell me why there is no State service to Inis Mór? What is wrong? I do not want a history lesson. Why is there no State service to Inis Mór?

Mr. Kelly has told the committee that the work which started in 2007 cost approximately €48 million. Would we have paid so much money in 2011? We paid €48 million at the height of the Celtic tiger. What was built down there? Are there outstanding hotels, cafés and toilets with world-class bells and whistles in Cill Rónáin? I think the €48 million bill is the county council's business and not that of the islanders.

I agree with much of what Deputy Ó Cuív has said in this regard. That might be extreme, but that is how I feel about it. We have to get on with living on the island, educating people on it, visiting it and using it as part of the great Wild Atlantic Way. The islanders' transport to and from the island is like our rural transport. We had people in here last week to talk about rural communities.

How much money did Galway County Council spend on legal advice? I think that is a good question. When I look at the witnesses, why do I feel that communication between those on the mainland and those on the island has broken down? I suppose it is because I come from a background in communications. I have a strong sense that right seems to be on one side and not on the other. Why do I feel that? Maybe the witnesses will answer that question.

My final question relates to services. Do the islanders have a service now? Maybe they will answer that.

Deputy Michael Collins: I welcome the witnesses and thank them for their presentations. As there are eight inhabited islands in my constituency of Cork South-West, I have a fair idea of the struggle faced by islanders. Nothing has surprised me as I have been listening to the witnesses speaking about the current situation, which Deputy Ó Cuív has been raising in the Dáil on behalf of the people of Inis Mór. It seems to me that this must have been coming down the road for quite some time. Why was it allowed to reach the point of crisis? Cathy Ní Ghóill has said she was lucky to get a service out of the island today. Why was this point allowed to be reached? I should not be surprised, given that the cable car to Dursey Island was withdrawn on Friday evening for the weekend, with little communication on the issue in west Cork. It became a crisis for the islanders over the weekend. There is only one operator of the cable car. That is a long-term issue in west Cork. I know there are many good ferry operators out there. The ferry services to and from places like Whiddy Island and Long Island are run to the liking of the island community, as much as possible.

Mr. Murray mentioned some of the great difficulties encountered on our islands, including population decreases. Housing policy is being debated in the Dáil Chamber today, but I wonder whether there is any housing policy in relation to our islands. Island populations are decreasing. The nearest social housing is on the mainland. That in itself sends a clear message to me about the Government's thoughts for the future of our islands. When I attended a meeting a couple of weeks ago on Bere Island, which is off the coast near Castletownbere, I learned about the disrespect shown to islanders when they come to the mainland. They are unable to tie up their boats in Castletownbere. It is scandalous that elderly and pregnant women have to walk across boats to get onto the pier. There is little or no sympathy for islanders or understanding of island life. I come from a peninsula that is like an island. When the programme for Government was being drawn up, I made the case for people who live on islands and peninsulas, but I found there was a lack of understanding of their way of living. This is more of it here today. I sympathise with the witnesses as they contend with these serious issues.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: Níl mé i mo bhall den choiste seo. Tháinig mé anseo chun éisteacht. Tá an scéal ar eolas agam. Ba mhaith liom rud ginearálta a rá bunaithe ar mo thaithí ón am gur toghadh mé deich mí ó shin. Tá mé cinnte go bhfuil easpa tuiscine agus easpa tola ón gcomhairle chontae agus ón Rialtas maidir leis an saol ar oileáin na tíre seo. Ba mhaith liom bheith mícheart. Tá easpa polasaí i gceist. Is é sin an méid. Éisteoidh mé ar aon nós.

Chairman: Tabharfaidh mé deis don chomhairle contae na ceisteanna sin a fhreagairt ar dtús.

Mr. Kevin Kelly: It is probably fair to say there are many instances of constructive and collaborative engagement between Galway County Council and the island communities. There is a lot of dialogue, although there is a divergence of opinion on this particular issue. I would not in any way classify it as a question of being right or wrong. A democratic decision was made in the context of having an increased cost for a facility and, in straitened times, how that might be paid for. Galway County Council had a budget of €160 million prior to the demise of the economy, but the figure is now €105. In a scenario where the Government had provided for the capital cost of the infrastructure, there was an increased cost which had to be paid for. The democratic decision was that part of that cost would be paid by users of the facility. It was always expected that cost would be passed on to the passenger. I want to be clear that the cost for islanders and every regular visitor to the island would be €5 per annum, not 80 cent per trip. Anybody going there regularly, for any reason, be they islanders or not, it would cost them €5 per annum.

Significant figures have been quoted in the recent discussions concerning the number of regular trips for islanders as a proportion of the total. Members of the committee have expressed surprise over the size of the contract. Due to its nature, however, it was not a fixed price contract. It had to be a measured contract which involves building a significant facility in the Atlantic Ocean. Therefore, the costs were significant. One can talk at any level of detail about the facilities but it is essentially a harbour. Those costs are derived from the type and scale of activity, and its location. Indeed, there are plans for other facilities and, no doubt, cost will become an issue there in due course.

Of course, Galway County Council would prefer if it did not have to impose charges. However, in the instance it did so, the court cases that followed were not instigated by the council but needed to be defended by it, having undertaken a democratic process in order to uphold the democratic right of elected members to make a decision on by-laws, and not simply roll over in the face of opposition particularly in the context of an individual operator.

I think Ms Ní Ghóill will agree that there was a lot of discussion on the by-laws from the outset. If memory serves me correctly, when they were first mooted in September 2010 within weeks there was a public meeting on the island where the discussion started. Over the 13 months of the process, there were a number of changes. Members have mentioned that there were various other avenues for charging and all those were discussed. There were many other charges in the by-laws which were removed as part of that consultation process, including consultation with the islanders. Therefore, significant changes were made to the by-laws and the amount of money that could be derived from them is substantially less now than it would have been at the initial iteration of same.

I do not have an accurate figure for the costs pre-the new harbour and post it. However, as regards the figures outlined, it is not an increase of €100,000. As I have outlined, at the early stages of the process, the estimated costs were between €150,000 and €200,000 per annum. During the court case, the estimated costs were €176,600. The actual costs, outlined in the context of costs incurred over the period 2012 to 2015, are between €118,000 and €204,000 for direct costs, including the harbour master and the general operative costs of insurance, electricity and materials. There are additional costs which we also need to provide for at this stage.

The Chairman mentioned the foreshore lease, in particular. That issue is currently under discussion and consideration. However, the figure that was given to us as an annual fee for the foreshore lease was €35,000 or an option of a once-off capital payment in excess of €400,000. That is an issue of concern to us and if we were able to eliminate such a cost it would signifi-

cantly improve our scenario. It should be clear that no matter what emerges from the discussions, or if there ever had to be any discussions in the first instance, the amount of revenue generated by the by-laws was only going to be a portion of the annual running costs. The costs have nothing to do with the construction of the harbour itself. As I outlined earlier in the submission, part of those costs relate to significant ongoing maintenance costs and equipment replacement due to the harsh environment of the facility, which included navigational aids, public lighting and safety ladders.

Galway County Council's policies in respect of the islands are very positive. I would like to think that while we are having a discussion here on a particular issue over which there is disagreement, and Ms Ní Ghóill and I have discussed it on a number of occasions, the policies of the council towards the islands are supportive in the context of our current resources. Perhaps Ms Ní Ghóill will talk about why the State has no service to Inis Mór. It is not something that I can comment on.

A significant amount of money has been spent on the legal process. When one spends 11 days in the High Court and then goes on to the Supreme Court, it is a significant cost. Those costs are currently with the accountants and the Taxing Master. A significant amount of money is due to Galway County Council arising from that court case and the fact that the findings were in the council's favour in both courts.

Island Ferries Teoranta has clearly indicated that having regard to the financial issues which pertain, though the arrears of fees due for the period from 2012 to 2015, plus the significant legal costs which are due to Galway County Council, plus the fee-----

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: There will be nobody left on the island.

Mr. Kevin Kelly: There will be because at the end of the day, while the winter period might be financially constrained in terms of operating a service, on a year-round basis the ferry service is a viable proposition for Inis Mór.

I do not know if I have managed to answer all the questions.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: I apologise for interrupting Mr. Kelly. Can he run those costs by me again, including the backlog? He was reading from a list when I interrupted him.

Mr. Kevin Kelly: The list.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: He outlined a kind of list and mentioned legal costs and the backlog. What did he say?

Mr. Kevin Kelly: There are a couple of main elements. There are arrears of by-law fees.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: What do they amount to?

Mr. Kevin Kelly: At 80 cent they would exceed €400,000. The legal fees due to Galway County Council would be in excess of €400,000.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: Absolutely.

Mr. Kevin Kelly: There is also the scenario of the fee to be paid in future on foot of the by-laws. Those matters are all under discussion at present. I have indicated to the committee that

discussions are ongoing. We have made progress and they will resume tomorrow.

Notwithstanding the fact that this scenario has occurred, I am keen to emphasise the importance of recognising that the issue of the by-laws and the 80 cent is only one small part of an overall puzzle involving the ferry service to Inis Mór. Galway County Council is involved in that part, but other aspects are being dealt with by the Department. Discussions are ongoing between the Department and the operators in that regard.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: I asked a question relating to facilities on the pier.

Mr. Kevin Finn: The project was a significant development. We have always taken the position that we were mere agents in delivering it. Our contribution to the development was approximately €190,000, while the remainder of the money was provided through the Department Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Significant expenditure was incurred. Since it is offshore, the cost almost automatically increases by up to 40% on account of getting materials there and labour costs. We have a passenger shelter that was not there previously. We have long-term and short-term car parking facilities that were not there before. Previously, parking was a major issue. We have separated the cargo traffic to another part of the harbour so there is no congestion in the harbour for the delivery and handling of cargo. All that has been transferred to another side of the harbour, leaving it far safer for foot passengers. We have put in a boardwalk for the large number of foot passengers. It leads up through the harbour and brings them up and into the village. The fishing vessels now have separate berthing facilities. They are no longer mixed with the cargo or passenger vessels. Passenger vessels have their own berthing facilities. The RNLi vessel used to berth offshore. A good deal of time was required following an incident. The crew had to use a smaller vessel to get out to the boat. It is now attached in the harbour. A deep-water slipway is in place now. The people on the island can now bring materials or vehicles to be offloaded far easier by means of the slipway. CCTV cameras are in place. There is far greater shelter and depth in the harbour for vessels. Issues arose previously, especially during the busy season when fishing vessels were tied up. Passenger vessels now use that space. Arguably, there was only one berth and the only way on to the island was by walking over passenger vessels – the island residents are aware of this. It was an unsafe set-up. There are no toilets or showers at the harbour. I have moved away from the section now but that was something we were trying to develop. There is a warehouse, a protected structure, at the harbour which could be utilised for that purpose. The €48 million investment has produced state-of-the-art facilities. There is no doubt about that. We were delighted to be part of it and to deliver the project.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I wish to ask Mr. Finn about the cost. This point has been raised sporadically. Can Mr. Finn confirm that this harbour is built on an island in the Atlantic? Can he confirm that in fact a significant amount of the cost had nothing to do with the pier but everything to do with the tonnhosc or breakwater built in a big arc around it? In fact, when it was being built we brought the plans over to London. Models were developed to show us what would happen in the case of a one-in-100-year storm and a one-in-1,000-year storm. The fishermen came with us and it was proven to their satisfaction that it would withstand a one-in-1,000-year storm. It was proven that the boats in the harbour would be safe. In fact, we have had some tremendous storms since the harbour was finished. If a paper boat had been in the harbour during those times it would have stayed afloat without destruction. The major cost was in fact creating a barrier to the Atlantic in order that boats in the harbour would be safe in all weather. It allowed people to get in there easily and shelter in all weathers. Unlike other harbours along the coast, there is no fear that at night owners have to move the boat out of the

harbour if a bad storm is forecast.

The issues raised by an Seanadóir Ó Clochartaigh are desirable. We had plans to develop the old store but legal issues remain to be overcome in order to provide the ancillary facilities, but they are running into hundreds of thousands of euro. However, millions went into the actual pier and, more important, into designing a breakwater to ensure the Atlantic would never hit the harbour at force. Can the deputation confirm that? There is a misunderstanding about the Atlantic. It is not a question of the investment being proportionate to the population on the island. The amount of money to be spent is proportionate to the waves in the Atlantic.

Deputy Noel Grealish: I thank the Cathaoirleach for allowing me to contribute. I am not a member of the committee. I welcome the officials, including Councillor Joe Byrne from Galway County Council and the representative from the Aran Islands. No one could question the set-up of the pier. It is an excellent facility. I compliment Galway County Council on the tremendous work done and the investment made. It was needed and the facility is now state-of-the-art in nature.

Unfortunately, year after year issues arise with services to the Aran Islands. If it is not the air service, it is the boat service. It seems to be an annual battle to try to keep the services going to the islands and to keep the people living on the islands. One thing about all Oireachtas Members is that we work together on this to try to find a solution. We must find some solution because we cannot continue to have this annual battle to keep the services and to keep people living on the islands. That is crucial.

Perhaps my question has been asked already. Is a ferry service available from Doolin to the Aran Islands or is it a cargo service? If a ferry service comes from Doolin, are the operators paying the levy to Galway County Council? Does the issue only relate to the service from Ros a' Mhíl?

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: I wish to put another question as an addendum. Reference was made to all the vessels coming in to the harbour. On whom are the charges levied? Is it only tourist ferries or is it applicable to other vessels as well?

Mr. Joe Byrne: I will not respond but I wish to come in at some stage.

Chairman: Okay. Ligfidh mé don chomhairle contae na ceisteanna sin a fhreagairt ar dtús. Is féidir leis an bhfinné teacht isteach ina dhiaidh sin.

Mr. Kevin Kelly: Every ferry company or passenger who disembarks is liable to the fee. The position is the same for other ferry operators. There is a ferry service from Doolin to Inis Mór. Those responsible have been billed. My understanding is they have not paid as of yet. We should recognise that the court determination was only in December last year. Obviously, there have been numerous discussions in the meantime. My expectation is that there will be further discussions with other operators with a view to bringing all those issues to a conclusion.

Deputy Noel Grealish: How much is owed by that ferry company?

Mr. Kevin Kelly: The figures are significantly less. The figures outlined in the court proceedings were in the region of 30,000 passengers per annum, substantially less than those for the main ferry company.

Chairman: Does Mr. Byrne wish to come in now?

Mr. Joe Byrne: I wish to make a general contribution. I am deputising for the cathaoirleach of Galway County Council who cannot be with us today. It is welcome to have had five Galway Oireachtas Members at the committee today. That is positive. As the discussion has developed, the context has become far wider than matters relating to Galway County Council. Perhaps, in a way, Galway County Council is a pawn in the game and that is a matter of regret. As leas-chathaoirleach of the council, I am keen to endorse the contribution of our chief executive. The joined-up thinking between our executive and elected members has been excellent in this matter. The level of information given to us and the numbers of discussions at council meetings are points on which we should really compliment our executive. It is, of course, a difficult issue for Ms Ní Ghóill and others. I live in south Galway and probably the farthest from Ros an Mhíl, but I lived on Inis Mór for two years and I remember Ms Ní Ghóill from those days. Like all in Galway County Council, I have a connection. To answer Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell, the Connemara municipal district councillors in particular have an incredibly good connection with the residents of Inis Mór, the executive and our Oireachtas Members. There is very good connection there.

The real issue is that we as a council have to sign off on budgets and we are constrained. The councillors of Galway want a call for some form a State-provided PSO service for the Aran Islands. At our October plenary council meeting, Galway County Council unanimously requested our CEO to engage with the Department officials to have that service provided. I concur with all the comments, be they from Deputies Ó Cuív, Grealish or Connolly or Senator Ó Clochartaigh. The real issue is that we need more State funding for the Aran Islands. In reality, it is not an issue to be discussed at Galway County Council level because we cannot resolve the situation. Be they right or wrong, the by-laws are in place and they were introduced in good faith. We want a resolution and that is why we impress on Oireachtas Members the need to come up with a solution. We in Galway County Council cannot afford to run the service without funding being made available. That is a really important point and, from that point of view, today's discussion has been very welcome.

Chairman: Tá go leor ceisteanna le freagairt ag Comhar na nOileán agus ba mhaith liom an deis sin a thabhairt. Beidh na freagraí againn ag an deireadh.

Ms Cathy Ní Ghóill: Tosóidh mé leis an Teachta Ó Cuív a chuir ceist ó thaobh an chonartha dó. Níl conradh againn agus seo an fáth go bhfuil an fhadhb seo againn. Dá mbeadh conradh Stáit ann, ní bheadh muid sa phonc is atáimid. An rud a theastaíonn ó Inis Mór, mar atá ag go leor oileáin eile, ná conradh Stáit a bheith i bhfeidhm mar déanann sé sin cinnte de go mbeidh an tseirbhís báid ann go laethúil. Mar gheall nach raibh sé seo i bhfeidhm ar Inis Mór le ceithre bliana anuas - freagróidh sé seo ceist an Chathaoirligh freisin - bhí an comhlacht príobháideach seo in ann stopadh am ar bith. Bhí an comhlacht ag rá go raibh siad, mar gheall ar chostaisí, chun stopadh coicíos ó shin. Ó thaobh Inis Mór, an rud a theastaíonn uainn anois ná conradh a bheith curtha i bhfeidhm láithreach agus praghas réasúnta.

Faoi láthair, tá an rud atá ag tarlú mícheart. Mar gheall nach bhfuil conradh ann, íocann muide níos mó ar táille fillte ná aon oileán eile atá conradh i bhfeidhm ann. Mar shampla, íocfaidh cúpla le beirt gasúr ag dul amach as Inis Mór €54. Íocfaidh beirt daoine fásta agus beirt gasúr ag fágáil Inis Meáin €32. Sin difríocht de €22 chuile uair a théann an chlann sin amach. Tá sé sin mícheart agus tá sé ann mar gheall nach bhfuil conradh i bhfeidhm. Teastaíonn é sin a bheith athraithe láithreach. Teastaíonn go mbeadh conradh buan curtha i bhfeidhm ag an Ri-altas. Déanfaidh sé sin cinnte ansin go mbeidh costas an ticéid laghdaithe. Tá inní orainn le bliain anuas nach dtarlódh sé agus níl a fhios againn céard a tharlódh amach romhainn. Teast-

aíonn é sin a athrú agus a athrú láithreach agus teastaíonn conradh a chur i bhfeidhm.

Chuir an Cathaoirleach ceist cén fáth nach raibh conradh ann. Bhí conradh i bhfeidhm go dtí Inis Mór go dtí thart ar ceithre bliana ó shin. Bhí an méid airgid a bhí ceadaithe ag an Rialtas do chonradh Inis Mór an-íseal. Bhí sé íseal mar bhí an comhlacht ag an am - an comhlacht céanna atá ag feidhmiú faoi láthair - ag rá nach dteastaíonn conradh le hInis Mór. Bhí comórtas ann ag an am. Bhí comhlacht eile ann. Seo gnó. Seo an rud a tharla. Níor theastaigh conradh ón comhlacht atá ann faoi láthair. D'éist an Roinn leis an gcomhlacht. Tíocfaidh mé ar ais agus ar ais arís leis seo. Níl an Roinn an éisteacht linn. Freagróidh mé ceist Mr. Kevin Kelly ar ball ó thaobh dialogue agus a bheith ag éisteacht linn, ach sin an fhadhb atá ann. Níor éisteadh linn. Ag an am, chuaigh muid isteach ag an Roinn agus dúirt muid go dteastaíonn conradh d'Inis Mór. Dúradh linn nach dteastaíonn agus go raibh an comhlacht ag rá nach dteastaíonn. Ach ag deireadh an lae, tá an Stáit ann agus bhí an Roinn ann le cinntiú go mbeadh seirbhís ann ach ní raibh siad ann le bheith ag faire amach d'aon chomhlacht príobháideach. Níor éisteadh linn agus tá muid tagtha anois ag an bpointe seo. Sin an fáth go raibh an comhlacht in ann an tseirbhís a tharraingt. Ní raibh conradh i bhfeidhm.

Dhá bhliain ó shin, bhí bagairt deireadh a chur leis an tseirbhís. Rinne an Roinn iarracht an conradh a fhógairt arís. Chuir siad amach ar tairiscint é. Níor chuir an comhlacht isteach air ach níor chuir aon chomhlacht eile isteach air. Níor chuir siad isteach air. Is dóigh go raibh fáthanna gnó ann ach, ag deireadh an lae, ní rinne an Stát cinnte go raibh seirbhís bhuan ann do mhuintir Inis Mór agus tá muid fágtha sa chaoi atáimid. Tá an comhlacht in ann an tseirbhís a tharraingt amárach. Tá an ceart sin aige mar is comhlacht príobháideach é.

Chuir an Seanadóir Ó Clochartaigh ceist ó thaobh an iar-Aire agus é ag rá go rinneadh níos mó airgid a chaitheamh ar phobal an thrí oileán Árann. Chuile uair a bhíodh muid ag dul isteach ag cruinnithe Roinn na Gaeltachta, faraor, bhí sé seo i gcónaí caite in éadan na n-ionadaithe ón trí oileán Árann go raibh an oiread airgid á chaitheamh ar phobal Inis Mór. Níl sé sin fíor. Tá airgead á chaitheamh cinnte ach, má dhéantar suas an daonra idir an trí oileán Árann, tá sé leath den daonra iomlán timpall an chósta ar chuile oileán. Tá an daonra is airde ar Árann. Dé-anann an trí oileán Árann os cionn 50% den dhaonra iomlán oileán ar fud na tíre. Nuair a bhris muid síos é agus nuair a rinne muid staidéar ar na deontaisí agus na conarthaí atá ar fáil agus ag dul d'oileáin eile, bhí níos mó á chaitheamh ar oileáin eile - níl mé ag iarraidh na hoileáin a ainmniú - de réir *capita* ná mar a bhí á chaitheamh ar an trí oileán Árann. Bhí sé mícheart. Níl mé chun ainm a chur ar an Aire ach tá a fhios againn uilig cé é féin. Bhí sé mícheart agus níl sé sin cruinn ar chor ar bith.

In relation to dialogue, i mo thuairimse agus i dtuairim phobal Inis Mór, tá briseadh síos caidrimh idir ionadaithe an oileáin, na n-oileán agus an comhairle contae. Is mór an peaca é ach caithfidh muid a rá go bhfuil an fhadhb sin ann. Ag deireadh an lae, tá muide mar pháirt de Chontae na Gaillimhe. We are a part of Galway county. I cannot speak for the three islands, but the representatives from the island of Inis Mór and I feel that in recent years there has been a breakdown in dialogue-----

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: It is very obvious to me.

Ms Cathy Ní Ghóill: -----and it is unfortunate. This compounds the situation and comes back to not being listened to. When decisions are being made, we are left out in the cold. It happened again last week. There was a decision of the stakeholders concerning this crisis last Friday but the biggest stakeholder, the islanders, were not allowed to attend that meeting. To be fair, Mr. Kelly has met me, taken every call and answered every e-mail and we have had

dialogue. However, when it comes to being in the room when the decisions are being made, we are not there and we are left in the dark. It also happened when the levies were being brought in four years ago. In terms of democracy, as I stated earlier, it was the wrong decision. If we had been listened to at the time, we would not be in this mess, but the councillors, unfortunately, did not listen to us.

I hate to put this bluntly but I feel they saw Inis Mór as some kind of a cash cow. There is plenty being spent on infrastructure throughout the county but there are no charges or levies to use it. This was a cash cow given the number of tourists coming to Inis Mór. That is putting it bluntly. I do not want to knock any more bridges. I want to build bridges with the council so that we can move forward in a way that this will not happen again. I want to improve our dialogue with the council. At the end of the day, we are all proud of our county. The Aran Islands, and Inis Mór, are often treated as the jewel in the crown of County Galway but it is time that jewel was taken care of. It is very tarnished at the moment and needs shining up because we are struggling while fighting for these services. This has taken two days out of our week. We have left young kids to come up here. It is my job and I will do it as best I can and with a heart and a half because I believe in the island, but this is ridiculous. We are four years at it. Deputy Grealish touched on it. The members are sick of looking at us. We are coming in, begging, and asking why is the plane going to be pulled and why we do not have a ferry. Dialogue has to be improved. We are part of Galway County Council. We are part of the county. I hope we can work on that as we move forward. Níl a fhios agam an bhfuil aon cheist a d'fhág mé amach.

Chairman: Tiocfaimid ar ais chugat. Ar mhaith le Mr. Murray ceisteanna áirithe a fhreagairt?

Mr. Simon Murray: I would like to pick up on what Ms Ní Ghóill has said in the broader context of all the islands. Galway County Council used to have an islands committee for the three Aran Islands and Inishbofin. It met at least once every six months. Mr. Kelly is probably the only person in attendance who was originally a member of the committee. We all found it to be a very effective platform for direct dialogue. We used to meet the senior representatives in each section every six months or so to discuss the island issues. I always felt that problems associated with things that were happening, or were due to happen in the future, were headed off by being discussed at these meetings. Many matters were dealt with within the council at that level. I have been calling for the reinstatement of this committee since 2007 or 2008. I am calling on the representatives of the council who are present at this meeting to consider the matter. The existence of such a committee would give us a recognition within the council. It would show that the council is willing to meet representatives of the four islands in Galway to deal with council-related issues that are arising or are planned for the future. I wonder whether we would be here today if such a forum was still in place. It is a question of communications. I do not think it is too much to ask for people to sit down for an hour or an hour and a half every six months. I think such dialogue will be crucial from here on in.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: I would like to ask Mr. Murray about a broader issue. Does the question of levies on the other islands come into play?

Mr. Simon Murray: There is no levy on any island other than Inis Mór.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Okay.

Mr. Simon Murray: There should not be any such levies. I know there is a court case and everything. We have all been around for long enough to see High Court decisions being over-

turned in later years because they were wrong. This levy is a tax on the island, in effect.

Mr. Micheál Ó Cualáin: Chuir an Teachta Ó Cuív ceist orm maidir leis an gcostas a ghearrtar ar na bhfoghlaimeoirí Gaeilge atá ar scoláireachtaí. Is é an costas céanna agus a ghearrtar ar scoláirí na scoile seo againn féin. Tá costas de €12 ar scoláire i gceist, ach má bhíonn grúpa ag fágáil na scoile, is costas de €10 atá ann.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Tá sé sin le hais ar an gcostas de €6 atá ann más oileán eile atá i gceist.

Mr. Micheál Ó Cualáin: Ba mhaith liom cúpla pointe a dhéanamh. Dhá bhliain ó shin, bhí triúr sa scoil againn ag imirt ar fhoireann peile, ach ní raibh sé d'acmhainn ag an gclann an triúr a chur chuig an gcluiche. Tá sé sin mícheart go huile agus go hiomlán.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Agus buachaill ar mionúirí na Gaillimhe ina measc.

Mr. Micheál Ó Cualáin: Go díreach. Rinne an t-innealtóir Kevin Finn pointe an-suimiúil. Dúirt sé go bhfuil an costas 40% níos airde nuair atá infreastruchtúr ar nós an céibh á thógáil ar oileán. Transnaíonn sé sin go dtí chuile rud ar an oileán, mar shampla, nuair atá foirgneamh ar bith á thógáil. Labhair mé níos luaithe faoi cothabháil scoile. Bhí mé ag iarraidh an pointe sin a dhéanamh.

Ba mhaith liom a rá leis an Seanadóir Ó Clochartaigh go molfaimid agus glacfaimid le haon iarrachtaí ón gcomhchoiste. Bheimid fíorbhuíoch dá mbeimid in ann suí síos agus ceist an oideachais a phlé go sonrach. Tá mé cinnte go mbeadh ionadaithe ó Bhord Oideachais agus Oiliúna na Gaillimhe agus Ros Comáin fíorshásta é sin a chloisteáil.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Beidh sé sin socaithe.

Chairman: Tá Mr. Kelly ag iarraidh teacht isteach arís.

Mr. Kevin Kelly: I have one small point to make. As I said earlier, I would not want anyone to think these by-laws were introduced overnight without any dialogue. There was a great deal of dialogue, contention and discussion over a 13-month period until the by-laws were eventually adopted. I acknowledge Ms Ní Ghóill's confirmation that I have always met people to discuss these issues. I want to respond to what she said about last Friday's discussions with the operator, which took place on the basis of the commercial viability of the enterprise. The discussions were meant to involve detailed financial consideration of the issue. I had indicated to Ms Ní Ghóill that I would raise the question of her group's attendance at the meeting. I would have had no difficulty with that. I understand she had already departed County Hall by the time the meeting started. On a personal basis, I have absolutely no problem talking to anybody at any point.

Mr. Robert Meehan: I would like to make a legal point. The legal sensitivities pertaining to the ongoing proceedings about the historic levies that have been in place for a certain number of years - four years, in particular - form quite a substantial part of the discussion. The chief executive is bound by certain issues and legal requirements that mean there cannot be an open discussion. The discussion has to be specifically with the operator itself because certain matters would be *sub judice* if they were brought into question. That also presents a difficulty for the council.

Chairman: An-mhaith. Tá go leor daoine ag iarraidh teacht isteach. Tabharfaidh mé nóis-

méad an duine dóibh.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I will not take too long to ask my questions. An bhfuil muintir Inis Mór sásta leis an gcéibh a fuair siad? An gceapann siad gur céibh mhaith í? An bhfuil an chéibh ag déanamh an jab gur cheart di a dhéanamh ó thaobh foscadh a thabhairt do bháid a thagann isteach go dtí an oileán? Arbh fhiú an t-airgead a chaitheadh ar an gcéibh a chaitheamh ar an gcéibh? Tá daoine ag iarraidh a rá go raibh ollchostas ag baint leis agus nárbh fhiú costas na céibhe ar Inis Mór. Creidim go pearsanta go bhfuil céibh den scoth ar an oileán, ach ba mhaith liom tuairim na n-oileánaigh, atá ag maireachtáil leis an gcéibh chuile lá, a fháil. An bhfuil báid sábháilte ar an gcéibh ar bhealach nach raibh siad sábháilte cheana?

Ba mhaith liom ábhar a ardú a thagann go croílár na ceiste atá faoi bhráid againn inniu. Má dhéanann an comhairle chontae agus an Roinn socrú le Island Ferries conradh a chur in áit ar feadh bliana, nó conradh a chur ar fáil ó seo go dtí Lá Fhéile Pádraig, an mbeadh sé tábhachtach go mbeadh sé mar chuid den socrú sin go mbeadh na táillí de €10 agus €6 i bhfeidhm don bhliain iomlán 2017 go dtí go dtiocfadh conradh buan i gceist? Ní bheidh aon chonradh buan ann an bhliain seo chugainn. De réir mar a thuigim, tógfaidh sé bliain a leithéid de chonradh a chur in áit. Ní thiocfaidh conarthaí Inis Meáin agus Inis Oírr chun críche go dtí deireadh na bliana seo chugainn. Cé chomh tábhachtach is atá sé d'innharthanacht an oileáin go mbeidh táillí de €10 agus €6 i bhfeidhm don bhliain uilig 2017 mar chuid d'aon scorú a dhéanfaí?

I have two very important questions for the county council. First, if the Department were to offer it an annual lump sum equivalent to what it estimates it will get from the levies each year, would it rescind the by-laws and take the money from the Department? That is what should have happened from the beginning. I am not referring to the full cost of running the pier, but to the amount of money that the county council hopes to raise from the levies. Second, will the county council confirm that the councillors in east Galway were willing to get rid of the levies as long as the money foregone was taken 100% out of the roads money for Connemara? I think we need to be bluntly honest about this issue. Thirty of the 39 councillors on Galway County Council are from the east and nine are from the west. The councillors from the east said they would have no problem getting rid of the by-laws as long as the money came out of the roads money for Connemara. That would leave Connemara with no roads money.

Deputy Noel Grealish: I would like to follow up briefly on the question asked by Deputy Ó Cuív. I was going to ask Mr. Kelly the same question. Have there been any discussions with the Department on whether funds might be secured from it to cover the costs? I know that Galway County Council had a huge deficit after the works were done on the pier. Has the Department been approached to see whether moneys could be recouped in the manner suggested by Deputy Ó Cuív? That might be better than the imposition of a levy. I do not know what kind of relationship the Department has with Ms Ní Ghoill and her colleagues in the co-op on the island. It seems from what I can gather from my dealings with the officials in the Department that there is a belief that the Aran Islands are getting too much of the budget for the islands. I can honestly say there is a feeling that they would not be happy to provide the islands with one service a week. It seems to be a battle. When one goes in to talk with the officials, there seems to be a general feeling that the Aran Islands are getting the bulk of the funds. I suggest that consideration should be given to what the Aran Islands are worth to the Irish economy. We should be looking at the money that tourism on the islands brings in, rather than at how much it costs us to keep the service we are discussing. Can Mr. Kelly tell us whether discussions have taken place between the Department and Galway County Council since the issue of the levy arose? As Ms Ní Ghoill could tell us, when the tender for the provision of a ferry service to the

islands was advertised, no one else tendered for it. We have to work with what is there. That is the bottom line.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Tá cúpla cheist agam. I still think costas riaradh na céibhe is very high. I would appreciate it if a detailed breakdown could be forwarded to the committee so we can see those details. We are going to be meeting officials from the Department to discuss this issue.

Mr. Murray referred to the reconvening of the islands committee, which is a very good idea. Are the representatives of Galway County Council in favour of that? Perhaps the remit of a reconstituted committee could include transport issues involving the Department and other stakeholders. This would enable it to act as the coiste iompair I discussed previously. Would the council be in favour of that?

According to the figures we have heard, there was a willingness to accept a figure of 80 cent in respect of 200,000 passengers each year. That would equate to €160,000 per annum. It is obvious that there is some horsetrading going on with the Department. According to the Minister of State, Deputy Kyne, the Department was willing to put €40,000 or €50,000 on the table last year to try to resolve this issue. Surely there can be a meeting of budgets or funding to try to sort this issue out for once and for all. Galway County Council is looking for a certain amount of money to cover its costs. The Department and the operator are willing to come some of the way. Is that the approach we should be taking to try to put the by-laws to bed for once and for all?

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: The Government either has a serious commitment to rural Ireland and the islands, or it does not. It is right that I have been hearing about this issue day and night since I returned to the Seanad. Something happened in the general election this year because rural Ireland felt it had been forgotten about. Ireland does not stop at the Red Cow roundabout. It has so much to offer.

Although I reiterate my point that €48 million seems to have been a substantial amount of money in 2007, I take the point made by Deputy Ó Cuív and Mr. Kelly that significant costs were associated with building this facility. There cannot be a tax on the islanders. I wonder about the possibility of cross-fertilisation or cross-subsidisation with regard to the extra moneys that islanders coming off Inis Mór have to pay.

I would like someone to answer a question I asked earlier. Why did the State company stop providing this service four years ago? If it had not done so, the islanders and others would not have been in the High Court or the Supreme Court.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: I think there has been a misunderstanding in relation to the High Court judgment. It is obvious that county councils are entitled to have by-laws. We need to ask why the by-laws were introduced in the first place. They should not have been introduced. The effect of the by-laws was to divide the islanders from the rest of the county. We can keep saying the county council was right - clearly, it must be entitled to bring in by-laws - but I think it started from the wrong point in this instance. This should not have happened. It divided councillors from councillors and islanders from people in the rest of the county.

We still do not have a policy for the islands. None of this would have happened if such a policy had been in place. It is greatly lacking. This committee and the committee I chair both have roles in this regard. It is clear that we need to focus our efforts in this area.

The islanders have gone from emergency to emergency. We have gone to meetings to support them. It seems to me that they are not valued as stakeholders. They are not consulted until after the event. We have repeatedly asked for the islanders to be present at many of the crucial meetings we have attended, for example in respect of the air service, but the Department has flatly refused to enable this. The Department's position is that it is not the role of the islanders to be at those meetings. Many of the problems with the air and ferry services could have been avoided if the islanders had been included from the outset.

Reference has been made to the renewal of relationships that have broken down. That can only work based on a policy. These meetings are not important unless they based on policies that value island life and the provision of resources accordingly. Like Mr. Ó Cualáin, when I heard it being suggested that 40% can be added to the costs of projects on the islands, it immediately struck me that this must apply to all the people living on the islands. It seems to me that this aspect of the matter was not discussed at any stage before these by-laws were brought in. This should have happened in the interests of balance.

Chairman: B'shin iad na ceisteanna deireanacha. Iarraim ar na ionadaithe ó na oileáin iad a fhreagairt ar dtús.

Ms Cathy Ní Ghóill: D'iarr an Teachta Ó Cuív an bhfuil muid sásta leis an gcéibh nua. Bhí mé mar bhainisteoir ar Chomharchumann Forbartha Árann nuair a bhunaíodh an choiste calafoirt 15 bliana ó shin, is dócha. Bunaíodh fochoiste den chomharchumann an t-am sin chun stocaireacht a dhéanamh le forbairt a dhéanamh ar chalafoirt Chill Rónáin. Mar a luaigh mé níos luaithe, tháinig sé seo ó phobal Árann agus ó phobal Inis Mór. Níor tháinig sé ón Roinn ná ón gcomhairle chontae. D'éist an Roinn, agus an Aire a bhí ann ag an am, linn. Táimid thar a bheith sásta leis an gcéibh atá againn anois. Theastaigh sé uainn 50 bliain ó shin. Is cuimhin linn an drochstoirm a bhí againn ceithre bliana ó shin. Bhí go leor d'Árann scriosta an t-am sin. Bhí bóithre scriosta. Ní chreidfeadh baill an choiste cé chomh dona is a bhí sé. Murach an forbairt a bhí déanta ar an gcalafoirt, bheadh Cill Rónáin scriosta. Is féidir liom a rá mar fhreagra ar an gceist go bhfuilimid sásta leis.

Ó thaobh an chonartha agus na costais a bhaineann leis na ticéid, tá sé i gceist againn go mbeidh réiteach ar an fhadhb seo, agus go mbeidh an táille tugtha anuas, ó inniu ar aghaidh. Tá sé mícheart go bhfuil orainn airgead breise a íoc. Tá sé á n-íoc againn le ceithre bliana anuas. Luaigh Mr. Micheál Ó Cualáin an costas a bhíonn ar ghasúir agus ar chlanna agus iad ag dul isteach is amach. Bíonn ar dhaoine smaoineamh an féidir leo dul anseo is ansiúd mar gheall go bhfuil an costas an-daor. Nuair a bhí an praghas níos ísle, bhí oileánaigh ag taisteal i bhfad níos minicí. Tá na figiúirí ag Island Ferries leis sin a chruthú. Nuair a chuaigh an praghas suas, laghdaigh líon na bpaisnéirí go mór. Ba cheart é sin a réiteach láithreach. Ní chóir go mbeadh orainn é seo a íoc ar feadh bliain eile. Táimid tar éis ceithre bliana a chaitheamh ag íoc táille i bhfad níos airde ná aon oileán eile. Is dóigh liom gur labhair an Seanadóir Ó Clochartaigh faoin choiste iompair.

Chairman: Mhol sé gur cheart don choiste bualadh le chéile gach sé mhí.

Ms Cathy Ní Ghóill: Aontaím leis an Seanadóir gur cinnte go mbeadh coiste iompair ann. Tá leathnú amach ar an smaoineamh sin ag teastáil. Bhí an cheart ag an Teachta Connolly nuair a dúirt sí gur chóir go mbeadh polasaí oileánda ann do na hoileáin uilig. Is é tuairim Comhar na nOileán agus Comhdháil Oileáin na hÉireann ná nach bhfuil aon pholasaí Rialtais ann do na hoileáin faoi láthair. Níl sé ann. Má tá an Rialtas agus an tír dáiríre faoi na hoileáin, caithfidh siad polasaí a chur i bhfeidhm. Ba cheart dóibh suí síos le ionadaithe na n-oileánaigh agus muid

a tharraingt isteach sa phróiseas agus gan muid a bheith fágtha taobh amuigh den doras i gcónaí, mar atá ag tarlú faoi láthair.

D'iarr an Seanadóir O'Donnell cén fáth ar stopadh an conradh ceithre bliana ó shin. Mar a dúradh níos luaithe, bhí sé fógraithe ag an gcomhlacht ag an am nach raibh mórán airgead curtha ar leataobh ag an Roinn leis an gconradh sin. Ceapaim gur €36,000 in aghaidh na bliana a bhí ann. Bhí an comhlacht ag rá ag an am nár theastaigh an conradh uaidh. Bhí sé ag iarraidh dul ar aghaidh gan chonradh. Ní cheart go n-éisteódh Rialtas nó Roinn le comhlacht nó gnó príobháideach. Bhí sé de cheart acu éisteach linne. Chuir siad amach ar tairiscint é. Níor chuir an comhlacht isteach air agus ní raibh aon chomhlacht eile san áireamh. D'iarr muid ar an Roinn athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an gceist ionas go mbeadh sí in ann teacht timpeall ar i mbealach eile, mar shampla, tríd an airgead a ardú, ach níor rinneadh é sin. Dhá bhliain ó shin, nuair a bhí bagairt ann go raibh an comhlacht chun an tseirbhís a stopadh sa gheimhreadh arís, rinne an Roinn iarracht. Bíonn sé níos socaire idir mí Dheireadh Fómhair agus mí an Mhárta. Teastaíonn seirbhís i rith na bliana ar fad, ach gan dabht teastaíonn seirbhís an-mhaith i lár an gheimhridh nuair a bhíonn an aimsir an-dona. D'fhógair sí é arís. Cheap muid go raibh an airgead íseal, ach níor chuir an comhlacht isteach air. Bhí an cumhacht ag an comhlacht príobháideach. Ba cheart don Stáit agus don Roinn athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar sin agus a chinntiú go mbeidh conradh buan ann dúinn. Tá sé mícheart agus caithfidh na Teachtaí é a athrú láithreach.

Bhí ceist maidir le Roinn na Gaeltachta. Cloiseann muid, "All the money is being spent on the Aran Islands", i gcónaí nuair a théann muid isteach go dtí an Roinn. Luaigh mé go bhfuil an daonra is airde againne ar na trí oileán Árann. Leis na trí oileán le chéile, táimid timpeall ar 50% de dhaonra iomlán na n-oileán. Ó thaobh na Roinne de, tá súil againn go bhfuil an meon sin athraithe le píosa anuas. Tá aithne mhaith ag an Aire Stáit, an Teachta Kyne, ar na hoileáin agus ceapaim go bhfuil tuiscint níos fearr aige ná mar a bhí ag an dá Aire roimhe sin. Tá súil againn go dtuigeann sé cás na dtrí oileán Árann agus na hoileáin go ginearálta agus go mbeidh athrú meoin sa Roinn ansin.

Chairman: Ar mhaith le Simon Murray teacht isteach le pointe beag?

Mr. Simon Murray: There was a question asked about the net benefit of tourism from the islands, which is massive. We are recognised by Fáilte Ireland and the islands are collectively branded. It took some time to get there, but we got there in the end. Through that process, we are a huge contributor to national revenue. That comes back to seeking our share of the revenue in order to sustain the islands into the future.

I own a hotel myself so I have a fair idea of what I am talking about. Of our customer base, I would say that 75% to 80% are Irish people. That is quite common across all of the islands. The people who are staying and booking for two or three nights for weddings, self-catering, hostels, holiday homes or whatever it may be are all Irish people. Irish people are invested in the islands. All we are looking for is for our Government to think the same way and do the same thing. Irrespective of what Government is in power, there must be a continuous policy on the sustainability of islands at council level, county development plan level, national plan level and, for us involved with the European Small Islands Federation, at European level as well. It does not take a huge amount for people to think consistently that this is a country that has islands that need to be protected to ensure their sustainability into the future.

Chairman: Ar deireadh, ar mhaith le Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe ceisteanna a fhreagairt?

Mr. Kevin Kelly: I thank the Chairman and the committee for the time they have given to this issue, which is a very important but complex subject. It is fair to say that Galway County Council would like to deliver more, not just for its island communities, but for all of its communities. In a scenario in which we have 35% less funding and 32% less staff-----

Mr. Simon Murray: And no power.

Mr. Kevin Kelly: And no power. This is what it is like in County Hall most days.

Mr. Simon Murray: You might want to increase the budget.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell: Our names are still visible.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Does anybody have a euro for the meter?

Chairman: This is our energy-saving climate change plan.

Mr. Simon Murray: We can still hear anyway. Go on.

Chairman: Yes. Éist nóiméad.

Mr. Kevin Kelly: We continue to struggle on in that regard. From the point of view of engaging with the island communities, on behalf of Galway County Council, I have absolutely no difficulty with that. It would be ideal if, in addition to the local authority, it was a cross-departmental engagement in order that all of the issues could be adequately teased out.

With regard to the issue of Connemara electoral area, there may well have been some suggestion that the cost would have to be met by the Connemara electoral area, but there was no decision in that regard. With the advent of the new municipal districts, it is not a consideration that is unique to the islands or the Connemara community. At our budget meeting more recently, there was a decision that had to be made in respect of a saving in the east of the county. A substantial part of that saving had to be found within the municipal districts. That is a general approach.

I cannot read my notes in the dark, but the only thing I can say with regard to the grant is that we have come through a democratic process involving the decision of the elected members. The most I can say on that is that I will put any such proposal to the elected members for consideration, having regard to the functions that are reserved to them.

Chairman: Okay. We will-----

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I have one final question-----

Chairman: Gabh mo leithscéal. Tá Cathy Ní Ghóill ag iarraidh teacht isteach. Táimid ag iarraidh guthanna na n-oileán a chloisteáil níos mó.

Mr. Robert Meehan: I wish to clarify a matter on a point raised because I think it is quite important. I apologise and do not mean to cut across others. A question was raised about the positivity being put out in terms of the development of the pier and the product that is there. The council was complimented on the work that was done and on the development itself. However, there were statements made and I wish to clarify them. Deputy Ó Cuív asked whether the council would get rid of the by-laws if this grant, funding, subsidy or whatever format it takes is provided by the Government. Deputy Connolly was suggesting that the council was legally entitled to do so in whatever cases, but that it was the incorrect thing to do to formulate the by-

laws. It is essential that this is made clear. What the Deputies are perhaps trying to refer to are the levies. This is a huge structure. It is a huge pier and harbour in itself. It does require the by-laws. Whether they would have to be dropped in essence-----

Deputy Noel Grealish: Is it the levies Mr. Meehan is talking about?

Mr. Robert Meehan: It is the levies, yes. I just want the record to show that-----

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The question I asked was that if an equivalent and reasonable amount of money is given by the State - though it really should have been given from the beginning - that is measured on what the council is now collecting and not based on inflated prices, would it drop the levies? There have to be by-laws in terms of the harbourmaster and I have no problem with that.

Mr. Robert Meehan: My notes led me to believe that the question was whether the by-laws were to be dropped.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I have no problem with that.

Chairman: An bhfuil Cathy Ní Ghóill ag iarraidh teacht isteach?

Ms Cathy Ní Ghóill: Is cosúil go bhfuilimid ag críochnú suas. Ag an bpointe seo-----

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Tá ceist amháin eile agamsa.

Ms Cathy Ní Ghóill: Okay. Má tá-----

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Soicind amháin. An bhféadfainn ceist a chur ar an gcomhairle chontae-----

Chairman: An-sciobtha, mar táimid beagnach trí uair á phlé seo anois.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Tá a fhios agam, ach ceist an-tábhachtach atá ann. Ó tharla go bhfuil Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe anseo, an bhfuil na finnétithe ón gcomhairle chontae in ann eolas go dáta a thabhairt dúinn ar an dul chun cinn atá déanta nó nach bhfuil maidir le síneadh a chur le céibh Inis Oírr agus le pleanáil a dhéanamh ar phas a dó de chéibh Inis Meáin?

Chairman: Cé dó a bhfuil an cheist sin?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Don bpríomhfheidhmeannach.

Mr. Joe Byrne: Could the Deputy repeat that please?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Yes. What I want to know is cén dul chun cinn atá déanta le dul ar aghaidh leis an síneadh atá le cur le céibh Inis Oírr. Freisin, ó tharla go bhfuil an t-airgead íoctha le fada an lá ag an Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreachta, Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta, an bhfuil an phleanáil tosaithe ar chéibh Inis Meáin? Muna bhfuil, cén fáth nach bhfuil? Tá an dara phas den chéibh sin le déanamh. Tá an t-airgead tugtha don chomhairle contae leis na pleananna sin a dhéanamh le fada an lá.

Mr. Joe Byrne: I will refer that to Mr. Kelly for clarity.

Mr. Kevin Kelly: To refer to Deputy Grealish's earlier question, of course the issue of any shortfall in funding and how it might be made up is being raised in discussions with the Department.

With regard to Inis Oírr, we have been in correspondence and discussion with the Department. The project has been given the go-ahead. We are progressing it and taking up from where we left off with the consultants. There is some updating of the environmental reports required. Obviously, we have been through the planning process. There is a lack of clarity around the Inis Meáin project at the moment. I have been in correspondence with the island community on that in the past week. Unfortunately, we lost a colleague recently who was heavily involved in the discussions in respect of those two projects. We are just picking that up again now. Inis Oírr is progressing ahead and, from my perspective, further clarity is required in respect of Inis Meáin.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Maidir le céibh Inis Oírr, timelines to-----

Chairman: Iarraim ar an Teachta Ó Cuív díriú isteach ar theideal an chruinnithe seo más féidir. Tá deis aige na ceistanna seo a chur ag-----

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Ach tá rud spéisiúil anseo. Nuair a bhíomar ag iarraidh síneadh a chur le céibh Inis Oírr, dúradh nach raibh aon ghá le céibh in Inis Oírr mar go raibh ceann tógtha in Inis Mór cheana féin. Á thógail sin san áireamh, má cheapann an Roinn Caiteachais Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe é sin, is dóigh liom go mbaineann Inis Oírr le hInis Mór. Cén uair a cheapann an comhairle chontae go mbeidh sé réidh le dul ag tógáil? An dtógfaidh sé bliain eile go dtí go mbeidh gach cead agus conradh curtha amach, tairiscintí faighte ar ais agus gach rud eile réitithe? Cén fhad a thógfaidh sé go mbeidh conraitheoir ar shuíomh in Inis Oírr?

Chairman: Okay. Is é sin an cheist dheireanach ón Teachta Ó Cuív don bhliain seo, b'fhéidir.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Ní hea. Beimid anseo Dé Céadaoin seo chugainn.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: The Chairman will not get rid of him that easily.

Mr. Kevin Kelly: I will have to come back to Deputy Ó Cuív on the timeline.

Chairman: Ar mhaith le Cathy Ní Ghóill focal scoir a thabhairt?

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Chuir mé ceist agus tá mé ag lorg soiléiriú maidir le briseadh síos a fháil ar na costais ar an gcéibh. Níl a fhios agam an bhfuair mé freagra ar sin.

Chairman: Okay.

Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh: Could we get a more detailed breakdown on the costs of running the pier? I ask that they be forwarded to the committee in order that we can have a look at them in detail.

Chairman: Muna bhfuil sé ag an bhfinné, b'fhéidir go bhféadfadh sé é a sheoladh chuig an gcléireach agus scaipfidh sé amach go baill an choiste é. Iarraim ar Cathy Ní Ghóill an focal scoir a thabhairt.

Ms Cathy Ní Ghóill: Gabhaim buíochas leis an gCathaoirleach as ucht an chuiridh seo. Ceapaim go raibh an cruinniú seo an-mhaith. Ba mhaith liom buíochas ó chroí a ghlacadh leis na Teachtaí Catherine Connolly, Éamon Ó Cuív, Noel Grealish, Seán Kyne agus an Seanadóir Trevor Ó Clochartaigh. Le ceithre bliana anuas, bhí siad thar cinn dúinn. Bhí siad ag chuile chruinniú agus thug siad an oiread tacaíochta dúinn ó thaobh an fheachtais aeir agus báid. Tá sé dochreidte an tacaíocht a thugann siad dúinn agus táimid fíor-bhuíoch.

Maidir le Comhairle Contae na Gaillimhe, ag dul ar aghaidh, tá súil againn go mbeimid in ann an caidreamh a fheabhsú agus a dhéanamh níos fearr. Ceapaim go mbeimid in ann é sin a dhéanamh. Tá súil agam go mbeidh an coiste sin bunaithe arís agus go mbeimid in ann cruinnithe rialta, cé go dtuigim an brú atá orainn uilig, ó thaobh na n-oileán de a reachtáil le Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe. Ceapaim gur buntáiste a bheadh ann don chomhairle chontae agus dúinn féin amach anseo. Gabhaim buíochas leis an gcoiste arís.

Chairman: Tá fáilte roimh an bhfinné. Beidh an coiste seo i gcónaí oscailte do Chomhar na nOileán le fadhbanna agus cúiseanna a chur os ár gcomhair. Gabhaim míle buíochas do na finnéithe go léir a tháinig os ár gcomhair inniu. Is rud uafásach tábhachtach é seo. Táimid ag caint ar thodhchaí na n-oileán go léir, i ndáiríre. Is ceist mhór í. Beimid ag coimeád súil ghéar air agus ag stocaireacht ar son na n-oileán freisin. Tá súil agam go n-éiríonn go geal leo chomh luath agus gur féidir.

The joint committee adjourned at 4.45 p.m. until 2.15 p.m. on Thursday, 15 December 2016.