

DÁIL ÉIREANN

**AN COMHCHOISTE UM EALAÍONA, OIDHREACTH, GNÓTHAÍ RÉIGIÚNA-
CHA, TUAITHE AGUS GAELTACHTA**

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

Dé Céadaoin, 5 Iúil 2017

Wednesday, 5 July 2017

Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 2.15 p.m.

The Joint Committee met at 2.15 p.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	Seanadóirí / Senators
Michael Collins,	Aodhán Ó Ríordáin,
Danny Healy-Rae,	Fintan Warfield.
Niamh Smyth.	

I láthair / In attendance: Deputies Michael Fitzmaurice and Louise O'Reilly.

Teachta / Deputy Peadar Tóibín sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

Preserving Ireland's Natural Heritage: Discussion

Chairman: Níl aon leithscéalta faighte ó éinne. Ag tús an chruinnithe, ba mhaith liom iarraidh ar gach duine a ngutháin a mhúchadh. I would like to ask all members and participants to extinguish their phones as they disturb the recording services.

Inniu, ar dtús déanfaimid plé ar oidhreacht nádúrtha na hÉireann a chaomhnú idir flora, fauna agus gnáthóga. We will now consider the issue of preserving Ireland's national heritage, its fauna, flora and unique habitats. Cuirim fáilte roimh Mr. Michael Starrett, chief executive officer, Ms Beatrice Kelly, head of research, and Mr. Michael O'Brien, head of business, representing the Heritage Council; Mr. Ian Lumley and Mr. Phil Kearney, representing An Taisce; and Liam Ó Cuinneagáin Uasal agus Bernardín Nic Giolla Phádraig Uasal ó Oideas Gael.

Sula dtosnóimid ar a bhfianaise, ba mhaith liom na finnétithe a chur ar a n-aird go bhfuil, de bhua alt 17(2)(l) den Acht um Chlúmhilleadh 2009, finnétithe faoi chosaint ag lán-phribhléid maidir leis a 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 tabhairt, 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 chuireann 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 le hoifigeach, ina ainm nó ina hainm ar shlí ina bhféadfaí é nó í a aithint.

Before I ask the witnesses to address the committee, I wish to draw their attention to the fact that, by virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the committee. However, if they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence in relation to a particular matter and they continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. The opening statement and any other documents the witnesses have submitted to the committee may be published on the committee website after this meeting. Members are reminded of a long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the Houses or any official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

To commence with our discussion, I invite Mr. Starrett to make his presentation.

Mr. Michael Starrett: I thank the Chairman. On behalf of the chairman designate of the Heritage Council, Mr. Michael Parsons, and its members, I thank the committee for its invitation to address it today. I am joined by Ms Beatrice Kelly, who is the council's head of policy

and research. For the committee's information, Ms Kelly is also currently the co-ordinator for the European year of cultural heritage. I will return to the significance of that role within the Heritage Council at the end of my contribution. I have circulated a detailed paper of the current work of the Heritage Council as regards today's theme of preserving Ireland's natural heritage, its flora, fauna and unique habitats. The Chair will be pleased to hear that I am going to follow the structure of that paper.

It is important to place the work of the Heritage Council in context. It is a statutory body. Pursuant to its responsibilities under its founding legislation, the council proposes policies and priorities for the national heritage. It works as a public service in the public interest. It advocates a very contemporary approach to heritage management, conservation and development. Contemporary heritage thinking is about people and the places they live, work and visit. It is about forming an interaction between those people, their nature and the culture that is inspired by that nature.

Above all, it is about trying to improve the quality of the places where people live and work and the places we encourage others to visit. Indeed, the Heritage Council recently submitted a draft of its emerging strategic plan to the Minister, Deputy Humphreys. Three themes are identified in that plan, the working title of which is A Fresh Vision. All three of them are relevant to today's topic and to cultural heritage. The three themes are advancing national heritage priorities; nurturing a sense of belonging, identity and place; and ensuring a vibrant heritage sector.

At this point in the Heritage Council's development, I would equate it to a small to medium-sized enterprise. It has a budget of €6.2 million and 14 staff based in its national headquarters in Kilkenny. It creates and directly supports over 60 other full-time posts in satellite and other organisations around the country. Just 28 of those 60 posts are within the public sector. The rest of them are in the private sector. The Heritage Council's initiatives include heritage officers, the Discovery Programme, the National Biodiversity Data Centre, the Wicklow Uplands Council, the Bere Island development programme, the Burrenbeo Trust, Woodlands of Ireland, the Irish Walled Towns Network, the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland and the Irish Landmark Trust. Members will be interested to know that the last three bodies I mentioned are all-island bodies. The current Brexit situation may well have an impact on their work.

I am cognisant that I have just five minutes to summarise the detailed submission we have furnished to the joint committee. I will run through it very briefly from the section headed "Research, Enjoyment and Heritage Week" on page 2. The Heritage 1995 requires us to promote "enjoyment of the natural heritage", which is quite a task. The quality of research information and data is essential to informed decision-making. The Heritage Council has a very strong record of providing research to back up its actions and to help the Government to make decisions. The species decline figures that are set out in our submission paint a very sorry picture. Much of the information on species decline that is published by the National Parks and Wildlife Service comes through the National Biodiversity Data Centre, about which I will say more later in my contribution. People and communities want to change what is happening with regard to species decline. A piece of research we did in 2016 indicated quite clearly that 84% of people want to get involved in nature conservation to stop species decline and biodiversity loss.

It has been decided that the theme of this year's Heritage Week will be "It's in your nature". It is hoped that this will help local communities to get involved in doing something about their local natural heritage. The National Biodiversity Data Centre, which collates, manages, analyses and disseminates data on Ireland's biodiversity, was established by the Heritage Council ten years ago following a proposal to the Minister of the day. Until that time, no scientific data

were available to policymakers in Ireland to assist them in making informed decisions. The centre, which is based in County Waterford, operates through a service-level agreement with a biotechnology company, Compass Informatics and provides eight high-end jobs. It is recognised as the go-to place for biological information in Ireland. This information is freely accessible to the public at large and to policy makers, land managers and educational bodies. I will leave some samples of the publications produced by the centre with the committee.

Many members will be familiar with the heritage officer network, which is one of the Heritage Council's best-known initiatives. This country's 28 heritage officers are employed by local authorities to provide outreach and engagement at local level. This approach works because it is a national network supported by the Heritage Council. The heritage officers work collaboratively together and with the communities they support. This structure accounts for 25% of the Heritage Council's funding. We support the salaries of the heritage officers with the local authorities on the basis of them producing a community-led local heritage forum and a county heritage plan, which then attracts grant support.

High nature value farming is a participatory partnership with local farmers based on the design, development and implementation of local farming for conservation initiatives. As it is based on partnership, it contrasts greatly with the old-fashioned designation approach of imposition. The quality of natural heritage is an essential part of agricultural policy. High nature value farming, which is based on results, now operates very clearly in the Burren and on the Aran Islands. It was initially led by a Heritage Council initiative. Most recently, the programme has tried to ensure farming in Ireland receives workable and appropriately funded support under the Common Agricultural Policy 2014 to 2020. It has had some success in that regard. Our objective is to try to get high nature value farming recognised in the next Common Agricultural Policy round so that many more communities and local upland areas can benefit.

The development of the Wicklow Uplands Council and a series of Irish uplands partnerships is a practical example on the ground of where we have tried to make a difference by providing long-term regular support to local communities to allow them to achieve what they want to achieve within their countryside and landscape. Examples of the work of the Wicklow Uplands Council are listed in our submission. The most important and significant one in terms of today's discussion is the participatory approach to best management of the upland habitats in County Wicklow, which really centres on trying to resolve some of the problems of burning that we have recently encountered across the country. The Irish uplands partnerships are emerging as part of a new initiative that is being driven this year as part of an effort to spread the benefits of this approach into 25 upland areas throughout Ireland. The research material that has been provided to the joint committee contains a map that shows where those areas are. This approach is backed up by research with the communities on the ground and is strongly based on meeting the socioeconomic needs of upland communities and ensuring they are in a position to exploit the opportunities available to them and realise their potential.

All the Heritage Council initiatives I have mentioned offer potential. I have to say that the council's current capacity is enabling it to do little more than scratch the surface of its potential. We hope this situation will improve by increasing the council's capacity to support local initiatives. In 2015, the EU Commission stated:

How do we devise a more effective way of integrating the management of natural and cultural heritage? There is a growing awareness across Europe that nature and heritage management cannot be seen in isolation and need to be tackled in a more integrated way.

That is what the Heritage Council is trying to achieve. Ms Beatrice Kelly, as the national co-ordinator for the European Year of Cultural Heritage in 2018, will bring that message strongly to every corner of Ireland. There is a need to embrace new approaches and new ways and to find a fresh vision for heritage in rural, urban and peri-urban environments. The Heritage Council is trying to ensure the best possible information about all its work is available to the Government at local and national levels and available to the communities that put all Governments in place. All of this is needed if, collectively, we are to get this right for the people of this country and take the opportunities that are presented.

Chairman: Go raibh míle maith agat. We will go on to the next group and take questions at the end, if that suits. Cuirim fáilte roimh an tUasal Ó Cuinneagáin agus iarraim air labhairt os comhair an choiste.

Mr. Liam Ó Cuinneagáin: Tá Bernardín Nic Giolla Phádraig agus mé féin anseo as Dún na nGall ar son an eagraíocht Oideas Gael. Tá Bernardín lonnaithe i gCluain Dolcáin i mBaile Átha Cliath. Tá an frontar atá ar siúl acu i gCluain Dolcáin ceangailte leis na fiontraíochtaí atá ar siúl againn i nDún na nGall. Tá go leor den obair chéanna á dhéanamh againn. Go bunúsach, is eagraíocht Gaeilge muidne, a bunaíodh sa bhliain 1984. Dr. Seosamh Watson, a bhí mar Ollamh na Gaeilge i gColáiste na hOllscoile, Baile Átha Cliath, agus mé féin, mar mhúinteoir ón gceantar, a bhunaigh é. An raison d'être, nó an chúis a bhunaigh muid an eagraíocht seo ná go raibh an Ghaeilge ag sleamhnú uainn sa phobal. Bhí sé mar nós ag daoine "dearcadh na Gaeilge" a lua agus iad ag plé céard is fiú í nó cén mhaitheas í. Cheap siad gur "flogging a dead horse" a bhí i gceist. D'iarr said "what good is the language?" agus rudaí mar sin. Bhunaigh muid féin na múnláir inar shíl muid go dtiocfadh linn an teanga a úsáid ar bhealach dearfach - as a positive force - agus go dtiocfadh linn an eacnamaíocht a thógáil timpeall ar an teanga - to build an economy around the language.

Chairman: Tá cluaisíní ag gach uile duine. Tá ateangaireacht ar siúl.

Mr. Liam Ó Cuinneagáin: Tá sé ar siúl, go maith. An rud is tábhachtaí ná go raibh muid ag úsáid an tionscnaimh mar shlí le meon na ndaoine a athrú agus a dhéanamh dearfach ó thaobh na Gaeilge de. Ba sin an bunphrionsabal síceolaíoch. Tá sé tar éis athrú isteach i rud níos leithne. An rud atá faighte amach againn thar na blianta ná go bhfuil an timpeallacht cultúrtha, an timpeallacht oidhreachta agus an timpeallacht nadúrtha fite fuaite le chéile agus go dtig linne, mar eagraíocht, tógáil ar an saibhreas sin agus cur leis sa tslí gur féidir an ceantar in iardheisceart Dhún na nGall, agus sna háiteanna ina bhfuilimid gníomhach - na Cruacha Gorma agus Oileáin Thoraigh - buntaiste a fháil as.

Is ceantar álainn é. Tá doiciméid ag an choiste ach is ceantar ar leith é, cé gur deirim é seo mé féin. Is ceantar ar leith é Gleann Cholm Cille sa mhéid go bhfuil clú agus cáil air ó thaobh a chuid seandálaíochta de. Tháinig Dylan Thomas agus ealaíontóirí cáiliúla ansin. Bhí Fr. McDyer ansin sna 1950í agus 1960í ag forbairt agus ag baint úsáid as an chultúr chomh mhaith ina chuid oibre agus ina shaothair. Meallann tírdhreach an cheantair, ina bhfuil Sliabh Liag, na mílte duine, ach go háirithe anois le Slí an Atlantaigh Fhiáin agus mar sin de. Déanann sin grúpaí leithéid í Oideas Gael níos tábhachtaí fós de bharr gur féidir le hollturasóireacht scrios a dhéanamh ar an oidhreachta teanga agus ar an timpeallacht.

Tá orainn iarraicht a dhéanamh, i gcomhar le Fáilte Ireland, an Comhairle Oidhreachta, Foras na Gaeilge, Údarás na Gaeltachta agus eagraíochtaí nach iad, forbairt a dhéanamh ar ghníomhaíochtaí a bheas ag déanamh neodrú ar an chumhacht uafásach laidir a bhíonn ag turasóireacht ollchultúrtha. Déanann muid sin é seo i slí a bhíonn, ar bhealach, an-simplí. Cuirimid le chéile cúrsaí agus imeachtaí atá faoi stiúir daoine proifisiúnta aitheanta, atá i mbéal an phobail agus a

bhfuil fios a ngnó acú. Díolann muid iad amuigh ar an phobal domhanda - ní i nDún na nGall, ní i nDún na nGall agus Doire, ach ó Seattle go Singapore i ndairíre. Fuair muid fiosrúchán inné ó chailín sa Chóiré Theas - ní an Chóiré Thuaidh, ach an Chóiré Theas. Tá daoine ag teacht chugainn. Meallann an cultúr agus an oidhreacht daoine ar fud an domhan. Is mór an tairbhe é sin d'eacnamaíocht an cheantair.

Is sampla an-mhaith de na cúrsaí atá ar fáil ná an cúrsa seandálaíochta. Tá 5,000 bliain d'iarsmaí seandálaíochta in iardheisceart Dhún na nGall. Fuair an tAthair McDyer an tOllamh Michael Herity, a bhí mar ollamh i UCD, isteach le bheith mar cheannasaí ar an scoil seandálaíochta sin. Chaill muid an tOllamh Herity anuraidh, is trua liom a rá, ach anois tá Dr. Brian Lacey i gceannas ar an scoil sin. Tá sé sin ag leanúint ar aghaidh agus tá suas le 30 duine cláraithe i mbliana. Tá cúrsaí eile againn. An tseachtain seo, mar shampla, tá cúrsaí timpeallachta agus cultúir ar siúl againn. Tá 30 duine, múinteoirí bunscoile ina measc, amuigh ar na sléibhte ag foghlaim faoin trá, faoin bportach, faoin nádúr, faoi na héanlaithe agus faoi tógáil na seantithe sa cheantar. Tá sin ar siúl.

Tá cúrsa fíodóireachta ar siúl an tseachtain seo. Tá an ceantar ceangailte isteach le traidisiúin na fíodóireachta le cúpla céad bliain. Tá daoine ag teacht chugainn ag déanamh fíodóireachta agus dathú nadúrtha. Tá an cúrsa seo bunaithe ar chúrsa a bhunaigh muid le maoiniú ón EU - ón Horizon programme. Bhí taipéis bunaithe ar an Horizon programme againn. Bhí cúrsa eile againn, mar shampla, ceangailte leis an Integra programme ag tógáil fallaí cloiche. Bhí deireadh seachtaine náisiúnta um tógáil cloiche i nGleann Cholm Cille ag an deireadh seachtaine.

An teachtaireacht atá agamsa inniu ná go gcaithfidh muid úsáid a bhaint as ár gcuid saibhris cultúrtha imshaoil nadúrtha ar bhealach cruthaitheach agus go rachaidh sin i bhfeidhm ar an phobal áitiúil agus ar Éireannaigh go ginearálta. An dara teachtaireacht atá agam ná go dtig linn buntaistí eacnamaíochta a bhaint as sa dóigh nach féidir leo a rá níos mó, what good is Irish and what good are the old stones. Tá luach leo.

Mr. Ian Lumley: An Taisce was founded in 1948 as a membership-based charity affiliated to the International Organisation of National Trusts. In common with the National Trust, we hold properties, mainly areas of wildlife reserve. We were pioneers in the protection of bogs and taking areas of bogland into conservation in the 1970s. An Taisce is very widely known for its involvement in schools and education projects, including a new project in County Limerick which is pioneering learning about forests. We have an active role as an advocate for sustainable development, climate action and protection of nature through our consultee role in the planning process for agriculture and forestry, and in public advocacy and public debate generally.

We live in a time of global species loss and we have an obligation, which is not just ethical and moral but which comes under the UN Biodiversity Convention, to protect marine, terrestrial and other species. We have a reporting system in Ireland for the state of our habitats through the EU habitats directive's Article 17 reporting process. That takes place every six years, most recently in 2013. These are habitats which are rated as being of international importance. Of the 59 habitat evaluations, only five had favourable status. Thirty were inadequate and 24 were bad. The bad status habitats were concentrated in raised and blanket bogs, heathland areas and species-rich grasslands.

Of the 61 species overall assessments, only half were favourable. Looking at individual species and bird species in particular, there are currently threats to key bird species such as the

hen harrier and the curlew and there is a continued decline in red grouse numbers. Looking at the marine environment, European fisheries data for northern Atlantic European waters suggest that 40% of fish species are being overfished beyond their safe population maintenance values. Along our inner and coastal waters, there is damaging scallop and razor clam dredging, problematic agricultural impacts which are not being properly addressed and new impacts such as mechanical kelp harvesting in Bantry Bay.

Although we have signed up to nature conservation policies and legal objectives at UN and European level, we are pursuing policies at national level which are in direct conflict with these actions through agricultural intensification. The environmental non-governmental organisations have collectively published a document entitled Not So Green, which raises issues with the targets which were adopted in Food Wise 2025 and how they conflict with water and nitrates standards. Recent data show a mounting problem with nitrates. The document also addresses the decline of ten key farmland bird species, the extinction threat facing one third of bee species and issues around species-rich grasslands. This year the deliberate burning of land was highlighted, which was so serious in Gougane Barra in Cork and in the Cloosh Valley in Galway. We have a forestry incentive scheme which has not been subject to proper environmental and cumulative assessment as required by the habitats directive. That is exacerbating the pressure on species-rich grassland and on the hen harrier.

We have the Irish Sea, which is now being described as an ecological wreck, and we have inadequate resources to respond to this with the required actions. The National Parks and Wildlife Service, NPWS, is inadequately resourced and successive national biodiversity action plans are weak in their scope and impact and have no real effective targets. There is no action to address the status of proposed natural heritage areas, which continue to operate with a legal limbo status. We have a national peat land strategy which is entirely ineffective because it does not address the continued decline of blanket bogs and heath areas. We have only now, because of legal action by the European Commission, faced up to the conservation of the remaining 1% of raised bogs with a conservation plan and turf-cutting scheme now in place.

The answer for this is that we must have a new vision for nature. An Taisce plays a major part in this because the key is public engagement. There is a very important concept that is now internationally understood and recognised, which is not just to consider the intrinsic value of nature - that must be paramount - but also what is defined as the concept of “ecosystems services”. That should not sound too technical. It is simply the services that nature provides to maintain clean water, soil quality, fish stocks and pollination. As we face increasing climate change risk, natural services and natural functions, the restoration of river flood plains, wet woodlands, wetlands and peatlands have a major function in slowing down penetration of rain-water flows down river valleys causing flooding.

The NPWS needs to be adequately resourced with timetabled and targeted plans. We need to not just tinker with the Common Agricultural Policy, CAP, but to completely reconstitute the CAP and the entire agricultural subsidy system to ensure that nature comes first. Biodiversity enhancement should be the central objective of all Government Departments and agencies, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the Forest Service and Teagasc, with the reconstitution of the legal remit of those targets and agencies. Instead of the scatter-gun approach to rural environmental protection, which has not worked - including the successive rural environment protection schemes, REPS, agri-environment options schemes, AEOS, and other schemes - we need to look at models which the Heritage Council has already mentioned, such as the Burren life scheme, for area based high-nature value farming initiatives which could

be combined, where ecologically appropriate, with historic native woodland restoration. We need to work on the great tradition of co-operative structures that we had in Ireland that were developed in the early 20th century, and these would have multiple benefits, not just to those communities, but in carbon soil management, flood attenuation, recreational amenity and tourism development.

We must completely rethink our relationship with the marine environment, which has been a story of continuous decline of one stock of fish species, only to move on to another when the first is exhausted or overstretched. There is a legal mechanism under the marine strategy framework directive to give better protection to marine life and habitats through the designation of marine protected areas. It has been shown that these designations, for instance for areas restricting fishing, allow fish populations to recover with greater benefit in surrounding areas as well as protected areas.

We need to have a meaningful peatland strategy which would endorse and activate the recommendations contained in the EPA bogland report for 2011, which are science-based and target-based. We need to adopt river flood management strategies which are based on working within actual systems and to ensure that our actions in taking climate mitigation - including alternative energy interventions in wind, solar and biomass - do not conflict with biodiversity. We need more effective action plans for invasive species and, with Brexit, to ensure that cross-Border co-operation on nature protection, and particularly the cross-Border habitats, which are designated under EU directives, are not endangered.

I would like to conclude by quoting from Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si', Praise To*, which refers to our common home and gives a very strong message on the need to stabilise our climate and our common home, and to cherish each creature which has its own purpose, where none is superfluous. It states that we must go beyond individual and sectoral interest to look at multi-generational interest for the future as, and I quote, "the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us".

Chairman: Bhí sin an-suimúil. I call Deputy Niamh Smyth.

Deputy Niamh Smyth: I thank the witnesses for attending today. Tá brón orm. Tá píosa beag that I have at the moment, but hopefully that will change over the summer, Mr. Ó Cuinneagáin. The presentations have been very insightful, and I thank the witnesses for taking the time to be with us today. I know much preparation work goes into being here and I have had the pleasure of meeting with both Mr. Michael Starrett and Mr. Ian Lumley here previously, so I am delighted to have them here today.

On Mr. Liam Ó Cuinneagáin's proposition to use the Irish language more as a tourism attraction, he talked about Gleann Cholm Cille and how the landscape has so much history itself. Unfortunately, not every nook and cranny of Ireland has that benefit of a cultural attachment with regard to big names, historical events or historical buildings attached to that, but I like his idea or premise, perhaps, of thinking differently about the Irish language and how it could be used. I would say that perhaps we are not taught the love of the language firstly, and our educational experience has not been about the love of the language, but it was more something that we had to do. Does Mr. Ó Cuinneagáin see opportunities in schools for how we could change that mindset and thought-frame? I wonder about other parts of the country where there is no natural tourist attraction in the area such as in Gleann Cholm Cille, and how the Irish language could be used. I will be very parochial about it and use the Cavan-Monaghan region as an example. How could we initiate Gaeltacht in counties such as that that maybe do not have a

natural grá for it, or maybe have that impetus such as there is in Gleann Cholm Cille to promote the language?

On Mr. Michael Starrett's presentation, I was deeply involved with the heritage officer. It is a great credit to Ms Anne-Marie Ward and Ms Shirley Clerkin in Monaghan County Council, who do fantastic, real, tangible work on the ground that gets our local communities involved in the Golden Mile, in the discovery of the castle in Clones, and Heritage Week is a fantastic impetus for all that. It is similar to getting people involved with the arts, but with heritage, for people who do not necessarily have an inroad to it. Heritage Week and the Golden Mile provide an opportunity for those from all walks of life to get involved and to have an appreciation of heritage and culture.

I think Mr. Starrett said that there are 28 heritage offices around the country. From our point of view, what more could we do to provide resources that might be needed to have a greater impact? Mr. Starrett told us a little about how important the buy-in is from the local authority. I know that there are targets to meet laid out the five-year heritage plan. The heritage forum is very important too for getting people involved. If the ordinary Joe Soap in our communities is not involved, there is an issue. Creating a link with local authorities and with communities has been a real success of our heritage officers. Could Mr. Starrett expand on that a little bit more for us? I think the Heritage Council has done a very hands-on, bottom-up approach by having that engagement with the local authority. Is there any involvement with our education and training boards, ETBs, across the country in the Heritage Council, or could there be? Is that something we could work on for the witnesses?

Mr. Starrett spoke about Brexit, which is the greatest challenge faced by all of us in decades. What are the challenges for the Heritage Council, and this question is to Mr. Lumley also in terms of An Taisce not just for the organisations, but in terms of the work they do? Does Mr. Ó Cuinneagáin see that having an impact on his organisation? What are the opportunities it might present, and what can we do to enhance those?

Mr. Liam Ó Cuinneagáin: I am leaving myself open to an accusation that I am putting a monetary value on the Irish language. That is not the position. It was music to my ears to hear that it is an asset that we have in our community and in the Gaeltacht communities. I wish that were seen by all.

The growth in the Gaelscoileanna movement and in Irish language projects outside the Gaeltacht reflects the Deputy's question. It is the case that other communities are seeing the value of the language and the cultural heritage. Ms Bernardín Nic Giolla Phádraig, who is here with me from Áras Chrónáin, in Clondalkin, is involved with our project, but one of the reasons I asked her to join me is because it is an excellent example of a growth in an urban Gaeltacht. She might like to say something about that.

Ms Bernardín Nic Giolla Phádraig: In Áras Chrónáin, in Clondalkin, just as in Oideas Gael, in Glencolmcille, we have always seen the language and other elements of culture as being fite fuaite lena chéile or inextricably intertwined. In Áras Chrónáin or Oideas Gael, we found that people might come on a music course, hear other people speaking Irish and enjoying it, and come back the following year to do an Irish course or, in our case in Áras Chrónáin, take up an Irish class on the next term. It is about showing people that all of these areas are not separate. Obviously, all of it comes from a love of the language and the culture, but there is an economic offshoot to it. For example, one of the projects Áras Chrónáin has been very involved in with other community groups is in getting Brú Chrónáin, the newest heritage centre in the

country, opened last Monday. That has been a 14 year long project, working with the Office of Public Works, OPW, under the leadership of South Dublin County Council, but it was as a result of a vision from the people. In that centre we have 28 young people from the locality employed as and from this week. The Happy Pear has taken over the management of the restaurant in the centre. That started as a heritage project, but because the Irish language is so important in the area, everything is bilingual. It is now envisaged that many national schools in particular from throughout the country will want their school tours to visit the centre because it is interactive and there is much fun to be had by children and also adults. I encourage all the members to come and visit us in Clondalkin.

Last spring, we trained 45 volunteers who will be working on the heritage aspect. When it came to them choosing a name for the centre and for themselves, even though only about one fifth of them are Irish speakers, the English speaking element said it would have to be as Gaeilge. That is now part of the image of our area.

We are an urban centre, but we frequently hear about the Government wanting to encourage rural Ireland and the concerns of people living in rural Ireland. From my point of view and that of Mr. Ó Cuinneagáin - we are singing off the same hymn sheet - we have to look at our natural resources, not just our landscape and flora and fauna, but also our culture - music and dancing - and our language. If we try to see those as a cohesive whole, that is where the future lies.

Deputy Niamh Smyth: In terms of-----

Chairman: The Deputy has one minute left of her ten minutes, but she can come back in later. She might let the other groups answer first. I will call her again.

Mr. Michael Starrett: The choice of local authorities as key partners in terms of delivering the Heritage Council's work was fundamental from the outset. It has been maintained, and there is great support both at the level of the County and City Management Association as well as from the elected representatives. Ms Beatrice Kelly has been developing, with the chief executives of the local authorities, a cohort that we hope will cement that relationship for the next five or ten years. The business model of the Heritage Council is very deliberately chosen. We have 14 staff, but we have great outreach. Effectively, in terms of the way the business model works, we did not want to grow into a huge bureaucracy with 28 heritage officers based in Kilkenny. They need to be out and about meeting people.

Mention was made of the education and training boards. The emerging strategic plan of the Heritage Council has a very strong emphasis on education. Its chairman designate, Michael Parsons, is a former secretary school principal and he is driving that forward. Our former head of business has just been appointed as a director in one of the education and training boards, so we have great outreach in that regard also.

Both personally and professionally, Brexit is posing big problems. I mentioned our three all-island initiatives. There is the Irish Walled Towns Network and the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland. The Museum of Free Derry has been a very active member of the Irish Walled Towns Network. Carrickfergus and Derry city have been in it also. The Irish Landmark Trust has properties across the whole of the island. Much of the funding for some of those initiatives came through the European Union. Whether the Northern Ireland Government will be in a position to maintain that is one of the challenges we face.

We also made a very detailed submission in terms of the national planning framework as

that was emerging and the implications for heritage in terms of a national landscape strategy, the general planning framework, etc. There are consequences for heritage, but also for the communities that live and work in that heritage.

Mr. Ian Lumley: Deputy Smyth specifically raised the concern about Brexit. A conference took place a few weeks ago about the environmental impacts of Brexit on Ireland, particularly regarding effective nature conservation in Northern Ireland if there were to be a downgrading of or diminution in the habitats directive. There is a much wider concern about the political rhetoric coming from the United Kingdom in terms of its anti-EU bureaucracy, but these are European standards for food safety, health and safety and other products. There is a very serious environmental concern about the impacts of Brexit on this country, but I can convey a positive example in the Deputy's own constituency where a major co-operative initiative is about to be launched in the Sliabh Beagh area, which is an upland heatland. It is the highest point in County Monaghan, running into Tyrone, where there is a cross-Border nature conservation initiative to protect that area, which is one of the major refuges of the hen harrier. That sort of practical cross-Border co-operation on nature conservation, high nature value farming, sustainable tourism and development of cycling trails are the initiatives we should consider as positive as we face the Brexit difficulties ahead.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I welcome all the witnesses. I heard only a part of Mr. Lumley's contribution, but I will dwell solely on that because I certainly know what he and his organisation are about. I know the hurt and damage they have caused to people in rural Ireland over the years. They have prevented people getting planning permission. I can name two families that do not have a son or daughter living beside them, the Sweeneys and the Twomeys in Beaufort.

Chairman: We invited our guests in on a particular topic. I understand Deputy Healy-Rae has a wide range of issues he wants to address. I want to be as flexible as I can to ensure he gets a chance to represent the constituents he wants to represent. These individuals were brought in to discuss the issue of heritage. The exact topic is the issue of preserving Ireland's natural heritage, fauna, flora and unique habitat, so perhaps we could focus on that.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: We need to protect the people who are trying to put a roof over their heads. I want to address what this group of people have done in our county over the years. There's a McCarthy woman living in Shroneberrane, in Lauragh, and no one belonging to her can drive. Her son had to move into the town of Kenmare or perhaps further away. He was granted permission by Kerry County Council. His land was in an SAC but Kerry County Council in its wisdom granted the house because it understood the need for the house. Sadly, An Taisce appealed it. The person who appealed it was 72 miles away from these people and they were denied the opportunity to put a roof over their head.

Chairman: Does the Deputy have a question related to that?

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: Why do we do things like that to people who are the salt of the earth and who have held and maintained their farms and landholdings over the years since before An Taisce was formed? Local property owners inherited the land and fought hard to keep it. The witnesses have talked about people being prevented from cutting hedges along the roads. Do they realise that people's lives are in danger? We have no objections to hedges being cut inside the ditch but hedges outside the ditch on the public road and thoroughfare should be cut all year round. I have never seen a bird standing up outside the ditch and say the traffic or people passing by are doing it harm because they are not that foolish. They go inside the ditch

to nest. What we are talking about is nonsense. People use public roads to travel or to walk to do exercise, which we are told to do for our health, but in many places they cannot because the roads are too narrow and they are out in the middle of the road. Pedestrians are getting killed because of this. Mr. Lumley did his very best to stop people cutting turf. He may have some other way of heating his house and I am glad if he has, but in country places a lot of other people do not. They depend on cutting a bit of turf for the fire and he fought to stop them. We have that rectified and many people can cut their turf now who were told they could not do so.

Chairman: Does the Deputy want to give the witnesses a chance to answer the questions?

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I have a couple of other things to address. We will protect the hen harriers but why has Government refused to compensate the farmers? We often hear of burglaries of houses when people are out of their houses but what is the story when the farm is taken from them completely and they are robbed in cold daylight? They are getting no compensation. They will not be allowed plant forestry in it. They will not be allowed to turn the ground. They will not be allowed to do anything with it. This Government and the previous one have stood up and refused to give proper compensation to these people. It is totally wrong. I believe An Taisce is supporting this project of keeping farms for the hen harrier. It is fine to protect the hen harrier but we must protect people and their incomes first. It is wrong to take their farm away from them as has been done. I am all for the curlew and the ground nesting birds but An Taisce fails to realise the other issues. There is an idea abroad that we cannot shoot foxes at night. Do the witnesses know that foxes kill the birds? They kill the ground nesting birds. It is a direct attempt to stop people getting proper income from the farm which they deserve after farming it. Farmers cannot shoot foxes at night. The foxes are not so foolish that they will come around in the middle of the day and say, "I am here now, you can shoot me now". It is absolutely ridiculous. There are a lot of other vermin out there. If An Taisce went after those like it went after the foxes, people might appreciate what it is at more. We cannot touch a badger. At the same time, farms are wiped out. Herds are cleaned out when farms are infected with TB. Herds of cows are loaded into lorries and taken off to factories and men who have given all their lives trying to build the farms up are driven down to the ground.

Chairman: There is only two minutes left for a response if the Deputy is looking for one.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I will just say there are others. Mink are cleaning out our rivers. Why is An Taisce not saying anything about them? It is protecting them. There are seagulls and hawks which we cannot touch and they are picking all the eggs from the pheasants and preventing the pheasant and other shooting birds from prospering. Does Mr. Lumley and his organisation know the harm and damage they have done to the people of rural Ireland?

Mr. Ian Lumley: I had not understood housing was going to be an issue at this committee session.

Chairman: Mr. Lumley is entitled to focus on the issue of-----

Mr. Ian Lumley: It has not been cited as one of the major issues affecting nature conservation. There are facts and figures and statistics that are easily available which show thousands of single houses are being built, and have been built, in County Kerry over the past decade.

With regard to the cutting season, the restriction on the cutting of hedgerows is for the nesting season. Good hedgerow management allows for the cutting of hedgerows in advance of the nesting season and after. There has been considerable controversy over the Heritage Bill which

is before the Oireachtas. The views of the environmental NGOs are well known and are that the existing hedge cutting season should be maintained.

On the turf cutting issue, I am the NGO representative on the Peatlands Council and the situation has been resolved. The remaining 1% of raised bogs are protected under European law. We failed in the late-1990s to introduce the protecting measures that were needed and a lot of time was lost. An effective mechanism has been put in place and compensation, relocation and a resource conservation plan are in place.

With regard to hen harriers, we have been advocates of an areas based approach to sensitive habitats like the hen harrier areas that should benefit from a higher level of farm support and other grants as part of a fundamental reform of the CAP system. Those hen harrier areas can be integrated with high nature value farming areas. I am not clear about the issue raised on foxes because foxes are not one of the species under the current habitats reporting system. Badgers are a very controversial issue. We raised in our submission a very interesting pilot scheme that has been initiated in County Down in Northern Ireland for badger inoculation. Badgers are as much sufferers of TB as cattle. The cross-infection issue is very controversial and is the subject of ongoing research. Mink is an invasive species and is extremely damaging to other native species. Part of the reason seagulls are coming into urban areas and being more present among us is they have lost their historic and traditional feeding sources or those feeding sources have diminished. These include the herring, mackerel and pilchard shoals that were once prevalent around our shores and have now been lost through overfishing.

Chairman: I have a number of questions but first I thank the witnesses for attending and the fantastic work their organisations do. There is no doubt that there is to a certain extent a conflict between the work of organisations that are involved in the protection of our natural environment and how certain communities feel their livelihoods are affected by it. Often the source of the conflict is the fact that the Government is not necessarily focusing resources on the communities in that particular zone. If resources were put into that particular zone, it would alleviate some of the difficulties that those communities have with regard to some of the restrictions they experience in terms of the protection.

If we look to the United States and to Britain, they have a massive respect for their wild spaces. Perhaps this is because they have had a bad history in that regard. However, if we were to ask an American what it is they are most proud of in their country, we would be told their wildlife and national parks. The way Britain treats its woodland is an example to ourselves. There are good examples in this country though. The work that the witnesses' organisations do are good examples of it. For example, the re-wilding of Nephin is an interesting project. If we sterilise our country from its heritage and its natural habitat, we will be a very sorry generation in a number of years. Our own survival depends on this. Pollinators have a massive economic effect on the development of agriculture in the country. If we reduce the spaces in which those pollinators can function, we hit ourselves economically in the pocket.

One of my current problems with our forestry policy is that Coillte is forced to be completely self-sustaining and has to focus a lot of its efforts on the commercial aspects of its work. There are other aspects to its work, but it seems that the forestry we are planting is nearly all sitka spruce, which offers limited opportunity for our natural wildlife. What are the witnesses' views on that point? Are the heritage officers employed full time?

I was looking through some of the documentation furnished to us. I have four young kids who would be fascinated by this. I raise my kids in Irish. If I were to go to try to find out the

Irish for heather shieldbug, it would take me a while. Could the National Biodiversity Data Centre use more Irish in its documentation so that it would be easier for the likes of ourselves?

On river parks, I was in Toronto recently. I was told that from now on river areas that are close to the cities are not to be built in. Some 500 yd on each side of the river are left as parks. Is there any opportunity for such a development in Ireland in urban areas with more than 10,000 people? Could we allow for those river areas to be parks for people to enjoy in the future?

Can we have an update on genetically modified, GM, foods in the country? Are there any efforts by large companies to carry out tests and so forth here?

Deputy Healy-Rae focuses on real concerns among real people in real parts of the country. How do we create the balance of achieving the objectives of An Taisce and the Heritage Council and not feel that a certain section of society is being marginalised in some fashion?

With regard to the Irish language, many people in this country say that the Irish language is shoved down the throats of people. That is complete baloney. In actual fact, there are tens of thousands of people who want to use the Irish language but the State is refusing to use it with them. Gaelscoils were mentioned. Some 25% of parents want Gaelscoils but only 5% are given them. If a person wants to open a Gaelscoil, he or she will face a ten, 15 or 20 year battle to prove the demand.

Cad a cheapann an tUasal Ó Cuinneagáin faoin titim, de réir an daonáirimh, i líon na ndaoine atá ag úsáid na Gaeilge i dTír Chonaill? An bhfuil aon tuairimí nó eolas aige faoi sin?

Cé chomh mór is atá an earnáil turasoíreachta Gaeilge? Cé chomh mór is atá an éileamh? Ina iomlán, cé mhéad daoine atá ag caitheamh airgid gach bliain san earnáil sin? An bhfuil Oideas Gael ag fáil go leor tacaíochta ón Rialtas? An bhfuil an t-ionad i gCluain Dolcáin ag fáil go leor tacaíochta ón Rialtas? An féidir an rud atá á dhéanamh ag an bomaite a athdhéanamh sna Gaeltachtaí eile? Tá Ráth Chairn díreach in aice liom. I lár Ráth Chairn, tá áit darb ainm Tlachta agus is ó Tlachta a tháinig Oíche Shamhna. Tá Brú na Bóinne agus áiteanna eile thar timpeall ar an áit sin.

We might start with the delegates from the Heritage Council, then An Taisce agus ansin na finnétithe eile.

Mr. Michael Starrett: The Chairman's questions are thought provoking and I hope to give him an honest response to all of them. In talking about contemporary thinking on heritage, public engagement and all that is to do with natural heritage management, I emphasise that we cannot have a designation, an imposition and a regulation that people do not understand. Otherwise they will rebel against it. The way that the original special areas of conservation, SACs, were transposed into Irish law caused problems. I touched on the fact that the science really only became available to make those decisions once the National Biodiversity Data Centre was established. Once it was there and we had quality data and information, designations and so on could be justified. There is some catching up to be done in terms of public perception. Our research and what we have tried to do is concentrated on improving that relationship and work on public engagement.

The Chairman also touched on legislation for important landscapes in the UK and the USA. For my sins, I spent most of my working life looking at, studying and working in this area. One of the areas where we are quite weak in Ireland is we do not have enough what I would call enabling and empowering legislation which enables and empowers local communities or

authorities to identify what it is that they want for their area and to then present the case to do it.

Chairman: Are there examples of that in Britain?

Mr. Michael Starrett: Britain, France, the United States-----

Chairman: Could Mr. Starrett send us examples of that type of legislation? We would be interested in it.

Mr. Michael Starrett: Yes. The French example for its *parcs régionales* is based on the development of a local charter with local communities. The designation is based on and follows through on that. There are specific examples. There was a policy proposal from the Heritage Council, which I will ensure the committee gets, on that type of legislation just prior to the recession. It may be time to bring it to the fore again.

On forestry policy, the Heritage Council has produced clear statements on forestry. We work primarily through an organisation known as Woodlands of Ireland which is jointly funded by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Heritage Council and the Forestry Service. I think it has had a great influence on the management of our commercial woodlands. By any rational judgment, Coillte has changed its approach within the last few years. It is still driven by the economic imperative but, in terms of recreation and its embracing of a more fixed type of forestry, great progress has been made.

On river parks in urban areas, our national headquarters is in Kilkenny. It is only now that even Kilkenny city and county council has turned and realised the value of the river. It has been developing it at a local level. To broaden it out to look at the work of, say, the water corridor studies that the Heritage Council did with Waterways Ireland some years ago, where we were looking at a much more integrated approach plan, the river catchment management plans offer tremendous opportunity for that type of approach in Ireland. Despite some of the facts and figures, I remain tremendously optimistic that the issues and the difficulties can be overcome as long as we make sure that people and communities are central to the discussions and the argument and that there is not too much imposition on them as we move to develop all these new initiatives.

Mr. Ian Lumley: On the issue of the alienation of rural communities, which has happened in the hen harrier areas and with peat cutting restrictions, the answer is to move beyond those individual designations and to think about and come up with initiatives for the wider area that are based on genuine community engagement, co-operation and co-operative structures. A good model, which has already been mentioned by the Heritage Council and is internationally recognised as a success, is the Burrenbeo or BurrenLife scheme, which is in the limestone pavement areas of the Burren that maintain traditional grazing. Were that grazing abandoned, scrub would grow and shadow over the wildflowers that are a unique feature of the Burren. We must remember that Ireland is very much a man-made landscape since human colonisation. There were some centuries after the Ice Age, then we were deeply forested and there were extensive areas of bog. There is hardly any part of the country that has been untouched by man, but we need these structures and initiatives to be ratcheted up on a larger scale.

An Taisce is a consultee on the forestry applications and several come in every week. It is unfortunate that on a piecemeal basis and in relatively small areas of land, we have yet further blocks of conifer plantation, with some tokenistic inclusion of broadleaf species around the edges or a bit of the corner and it is often on land that is unsuitable, such as peatland or land

that has species with grassland or is in an area that causes conflict with hen harriers. It would be preferable to move to a vision of having a serious national programme of native woodland restoration. Look at how rich the Irish language is in our placenames. For instance, take the number of places in the country that have the word “doire” in them, reflecting that there was an oak wood in that place. Let us look at the locations that do not conflict with intensive farming or biodiversity where we can have large-scale native woodland restoration. That would have multiple benefits. Those woodlands would be a carbon sink. They would also play a major role in flood attenuation in river catchments and on upland areas because woods have the effect of slowing down high rainfall drainage into rivers.

We are very supportive of park initiatives and of using the canals. We seek potential to follow on from the success of the Mayo and Waterford greenways and using redundant railway lines as recreational routes. An Taisce, in fact, is the owner of the Boyne Navigation, which has been developed as a recreational canal route between Navan and Drogheda. There are conflicts to be addressed also. Many of the members may be aware that issues have arisen on the River Barrow relating to protecting the riverine ecology and plant life of the Barrow against its enhanced use for walking and cycling.

On the GM issue, I am not aware of any recent proposals for testing in Ireland but we should all bear in mind that GM is coming into us in all sorts of indirect ways in soya products, animal feeds and other things. Unless we look at the small print on foodstuff labels, we may not be fully aware of the extent to which-----

Chairman: Is it getting into the ecosystem?

Mr. Ian Lumley: It will take long-term research to establish whether that is the case. However, we know the sensitivity of the ecosystem. Any alteration to the animal or human food chain or ingestion of chemicals ultimately passes into the ecosystem.

Mr. Liam Ó Cuinneagáin: Beidh freagra an-tapaídh agam ar cheisteanna an Chathaoirligh. Maidir leis an titim daonra i gContae Dhún na nGall agus líon na ndaoine a labhraíonn Gaeilge, tá sé beagnach *pro rata*. Thit an daonra 3,000 nó mar sin agus thit líon na gcainteoirí Gaeilge timpeall an cheatadáin céanna. Tá na seanchúiseanna céanna mar bhunrud anseo ar nós fostaíocht agus líon an bhuiséid caipitil a bhí ag Údarás na Gaeltachta deich bliana ó shin agus atá anois. Bhí sé cúig oiread cúig, deich nó 15 bliain ó shin. Chomh maith, tá an líon cuairt a thugann IDA Ireland. Tá fócas de dhíth ansin. Má tá fostaíocht, beidh daonra. Tá sé chomh simplí sin.

Tá an turasóireacht Gaeilge ann le cianta de bharr na coláistí Gaeilge mar chuid den turasóir Gaeilge. Tá 25,000, de réir mar a thuigim, de dhaltáí nó de dhéagóirí a théann go dtí na coláistí Gaeilge sna Gaeltachtaí ó Rinn Ó gCuanach go Gaoth Dhóhbhair go dtí na Dúnaibh agus na ceantair sin gach samhradh. Ó thaobh an turasóireacht chultúrtha do dhaoine fásta, bhí muidne is dócha an chéad ghrúpa ag déanamh é seo 20 nó 30 bliain ó shin. Buíochas le Dia, tá grúpaí agus pobail eile á dhéanamh anois. Tá cúrsaí nua, mar shampla, i Rinn Ó gCuanach, iarthar Chorcaí, Uíbh Ráthach i ndeisceart Chiarraí, Baile an Fheirtéaraigh, na hoileáin - Inis Oírr, Inis Mór agus Inis Meáin - Contae Mhaigh Eo, Conamara, an Cheathrú Rua agus Dún na nGall féin. Tá borradh ar leith faoin saghas seo turasóireachta agus is rud maith é. An rud atá suimiúil faoi agus an rud a chuireann iontas ar dhaoine nuair a thagann siad ar chúrsaí seo againne ó Bhéal Feirste nó ó Bhaile Átha Cliath ná an líon daoine atá ansin as tíortha idirnáisiúnta. Bhí daoine as suas le 30 tír difriúil againne anuraidh. Bhí 1,500 duine againn i mbliana agus an méid céanna tír. Tá cúrsaí Gaeilge i San Francisco, New Eabhrac agus ar fud na háite. Niche

beag atá ann, ach is niche mór é do phobal iargúlta mar Ghleann Cholm Cille nó tuaisceart Mhaigh Eo agus áiteanna mar sin.

Ó thaobh an múnla, b'fhéidir go labhróidh Iníon Mhic Giolla Phádraig faoin Gael Galltach uirbeach, mar a déarfá.

Ms Bernardín Nic Giolla Phádraig: Ó thaobh turasóireacht na Gaeilge de i gCluain Dolcáin, tá feidearthachtaí móra ag baint leis sin. Tagann daoine chugainn a bhíonn ag tabhairt cuairt ar Bhaile Átha Cliath, abraimis, ó Mheiriceá, an Eilbhéis nó an Fhrainc nó cibé áit. Buaileann siad isteach agus suíonn siad isteach ar cheolchoirm, b'fhéidir, nó ar sheisiún ceoil nó cibé rud. Feiceann muid anois go bhfuil deiseanna breise againn chun é sin a fhorbairt. Suas go dtí seo, tá Áras Chrónáin ag feidhmiú mar ionad pobal. Bíonn fáilte roimh na daoine seo agus faigheann siad blaiseadh de sin, ach ní chuirimid aon rud ar leith ar siúl ar mhaithe le hiad a mhealladh isteach. Feicimid anois le Brú Chrónáin - sin an t-ionad oidhreacht ag an gCloigtheach - go mbeidh turasóirí d'aon ghnó ag teacht chuig Cluain Dolcáin ar mhaithe le cuairt a thabhairt air sin agus go bhféadfaidís, b'fhéidir, maidin a chaitheamh ansin agus tráthnóna a chaitheamh ar rang Gaeilge do thosaitheoirí, ar rang feadóg stáin trí mheán na Gaeilge nó ar rang seit damhsa trí mheán na Gaeilge agus mar sin de. An fhadhb atá ann, agus baineann sé seo leis an dara cheist a chur an Cathaoirleach, ná an méid tacaíochta ón Rialtas. Táimid ag fáil tacaíocht sa mhéad is go n-íoctar an chuid is mó den tuarastal, ach ní é ar fad, don oifigeach forbartha atá againn. Íocann Foras na Gaeilge é sin. Bíonn an brabús as go leor de na himeachtaí eile a bhíonn ar siúl againn ag dul chun an t-ionad é féin a choinneáil ag imeacht. Dá bhrí sin, má táimid chun tionscal na turasóireachta Gaeilge a fhorbairt, agus, mar a deirim, feicimid an-fhéidearachtaí ansin, bheadh orainn tacaíocht maoinithe a fháil ó Fhoras na Gaeilge nó ón Roinn chun é sin a fhorbairt. Sin rud ba bhreá linn a dhéanamh.

Mr. Liam Ó Cuinneagáin: An féidir liom cur leis sin?

Chairman: Is féidir.

Mr. Liam Ó Cuinneagáin: Tá sé tábhachtach go ndeirim go dtugann agus gur thug Roinn na Gaeltachta tacaíocht leanúnach dúinne thar na blianta. Sin rud amháin.

Is é an dara rud ná go bhfuil sé tábhachtach go smaoinfeadh ar ionad cultúrtha Gaeilge i mBaile Átha Cliath. Tá an chultúrlann i mBéal Feirste an-ghnóthach ar fad. Tá an chultúrlann i nDoire an-ghnóthach ar fad. Mar a dúirt Ms Nic Giolla Phádraig, tá 1.6 milliúin duine i limistéar iomlán Bhaile Átha Cliath agus dúirt céatadán ard acu - níos mó ná 30% - sa daonáireamh go raibh Gaeilge acu, gan labhairt faoi na daoine as an chuid eile den tír atá ag teacht isteach sa chathair nó daoine go hidirnáisiúnta. B'fhéidir síos an bóthar, b'fhiú do na polaiteoirí a bheith ag smaoinfeadh ar tacaíocht nó tionscnaimh breise sa dóigh go mbeadh cultúrlann ar leith don Ghaeilge agus do stair na Gaeilge lonnaithe sa phríomhchathair.

Senator Fintan Warfield: Ba mhaith liom fáilte a chur roimh gach duine. I got really worried when Mr. Lumley started mentioning the Pope. I spend my mornings in the Seanad avoiding the morning prayer. This place should always face outward. It should talk less and listen more and I am sorry Mr. Lumley did not get that same listening time from a colleague because he paints a grim picture which the Oireachtas needs to hear. The Pope is right. We are not the only species living on the planet and yet capitalism, imperialism and public policy still erode the fabric of the earth.

Turning to biodiversity, are we in the middle of a biodiversity action plan? Mr. Lumley

has said that successive plans have been weak in scope. Is there a need to develop a new one alongside the Heritage Council and the Department?

In terms of the resources provided for the Heritage Council, some €6.2 million, the Irish Film Board regularly makes noise around the kind of budget allocation it would like. We are obviously in the middle of budget preparations now. Where has the Heritage Council been in terms of funding since 2008 compared to the current €6.2 million? Where would Mr. Starrett like it to go in the coming years?

We have also mentioned species decline. As Mr. Lumley has mentioned, the views of various non-governmental organisations and groups in respect of the Heritage Bill 2016 are well known. I share many of those views. In terms of legislation more broadly, is there a need to revise legislation in the area of the Wildlife Acts 1976 and 2000, national monuments legislation, the National Cultural Institutions Act 1997 and any other legislation which I might have missed which concerns heritage? Is there a need for the Minister to review, revise and modernise such legislation? Is there a need to update the national heritage plan alongside the Department?

Mr. Michael Starrett: I would like to make more noise around funding. I thought we made enough, but I will make some more now. In 2008 the Heritage Council had a budget allocation of just over €20 million. That sits at €6.2 million today.

Senator Fintan Warfield: That is the biggest drop across-----

Mr. Michael Starrett: The first cuts in 2008 and 2009 cut our funding by 65% straight away. It is amazing that the organisation survived. It is a tribute to the local communities and the organisations which we support that they have all survived. They have all cut their cloth and survived the recession. They have all suffered job losses and the Heritage Council has also suffered in terms of capacity. We have a small team anyway but to lose two staff members out of 16 represents a big percentage loss. We have clearly signalled that we want to incrementally build that back up again. In the emerging strategic plan we are seeking to build that up over the course of the next five years, to just under €10 million initially in the first year and back up to more than €20 million by the fifth year of that plan. That is not an unreasonable request in terms of what the Heritage Council can achieve and hopes to achieve in its new vision. Of course we have to gain Departmental and political support to allow that to happen.

The Senator mentioned legislation. The Heritage Council has been quite clear in this regard. The Wildlife Acts 1976 and 2000 have certainly sat for a long time and are in need of comprehensive revision. I would like to see that in a programme for Government in the future. I have already touched on the need for a new form of legislation which could help to resolve the issues - enabling and empowering legislation for our landscapes and countryside, for example, which could involve communities. Again, the Heritage Council has firm proposals which could help develop that type of approach.

There was a move to consolidate all national monuments legislation and great progress had been made in that area. That also relates to communities and cultural and national heritage. To be honest I am not clear how that legislation is progressing but it is a provision which needs to be undertaken as soon as possible.

There is a commitment in the programme for Government to produce a new national heritage plan which will, and should, be led by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The Heritage Council is ready to help and assist in whatever way it can

to bring that to fruition.

I believe I have covered all the points which were directed at me.

Mr. Ian Lumley: I would first like to raise the status of the biodiversity plan. Many organisations and nearly every statutory body including the Heritage Council and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, NPWS, have strategic plans. The NPWS's plan for 2017 to 2021 was subject to a public consultation earlier this year. Worryingly, a number of recommendations and actions in the published draft were watered down from an earlier draft prepared last year, particularly in the area of giving enhanced protection and status to natural heritage areas, most of which are only proposed natural heritage areas under the Wildlife Acts and have no legal status. There was also a watering down in the area of giving active support to threat response plans for endangered species like the curlew.

There is a real worry in that regard and I cannot help but suspect that there is an unwillingness to admit failure. The targets in the two previous plans have clearly failed because the NPWS was not given the resources. That has shown up in the continuing Article 17 reports and the update data which is coming in. Major initiatives are being taken. There is programme running at the moment to halt the decline of the freshwater pearl mussel. We are waiting for data on that to come in. The NPWS is simply not given the resources which it needs.

Major policy decisions at Government level are consistently sector driven. The agricultural targets are very much driven by big agricultural business, such as the targets for increasing dairy production under Food Harvest 2020 and Food Wise 2025. The marine sector's plan, Harnessing our Ocean Wealth, is very much based on exploitative extraction targets. These are then supported by the full weight of industry and by the major lobby groups which represent those industrial sectors. The voice of nature and the status of the NPWS are left very weak. Over the years I have been at many stakeholder consultations. It is very difficult because one often sees that the NPWS is just trying to limit damage, because a target or policy has been adopted which will have the obvious effect of increasing intensification. That is why we need to look way beyond resourcing the NPWS and giving it better status as an independent body on the model of the Environmental Protection Agency, which would be a clear path to follow, and to look at changing the fundamental legal status and strategic objectives of the other State agencies concerned with land and marine management. We need to look at changing the fundamental legal status and strategic objectives of the other State agencies concerned with land and marine management so that the protection of biodiversity is a core objective that is integrated with all other considerations, as set out in the UN sustainable development goals. If this is not done, we will continue to see species and habitat decline. All of us remember getting our leaving certificate results. The red areas on the results to which I am referring depict the bad results we are achieving in respect of the species and habitats where our actions are failing.

There is a need to reform the Wildlife Acts and the general protection regime. It is disappointing that the only wildlife measure that is going through the Oireachtas at the moment will erode wildlife protection by extending the cutting and burning season. There has been a complete failure to investigate properly the devastating wild fires in places like Gougane Barra in County Cork and the Cloosh Valley in County Galway. These wildlife crimes have had a very damaging effect. Nesting species and invertebrates have been wiped out completely. Much wider damage is being done. Problems like erosion and soil carbon loss are being exacerbated. The pollution of watercourses is affecting fish spawning. The impact of these fires, which are getting worse every year, is disastrous. There is potential for the risk to increase as climate change starts to kick in because we could be facing lower rainfall periods in late spring and

early summer. That is going to exacerbate the risk and the potential impact of fires.

The answer to this is to take a new approach. We are already meant to be thinking about river basin catchments and upland areas in an integrated way. The strategic plans for such areas should be based on proper community and landowner co-operation. The benefits of this should be equitably shared in the areas in question and downstream as well. Downstream benefits should include flood relief and attenuation, rather than of the sorts of hard engineering responses to flood relief we are getting in a number of urban areas. Very unrealistic demands to drain the Shannon are in circulation at the moment. A better response would be to look at the Shannon as an overall drainage catchment and to restore traditional flood plains or wet woodlands in a number of less agriculturally productive areas. Such an approach would bring multiple benefits.

We need to reform the way we think about agricultural subsidies and the way we use CAP, which accounts for hundreds of millions of euro. The analysis of the spending under the various rural support schemes over the decades has been very disappointing. There is a need for complete reform. There should be a move towards an area-based, strategic and results-based system that benefits landowners, the wider community, the country as a whole, our nature and our biodiversity.

Deputy Michael Collins: I welcome all the witnesses. I have a few interesting questions. Most of them relate to An Taisce. The representatives of the Heritage Council raised issues like upland farms and fires.

To be honest, I would echo much of what Deputy Danny Healy-Rae said about An Taisce. I come from a rural community. An Taisce was founded in 1948. I was born in 1968. This is the first I have seen of An Taisce and I have been in the community for many years. I was a member of Cork County Council for many years before I was elected to the Dáil. Does An Taisce have any idea of the anger and frustration it has caused among rural communities and rural people?

Deputy Tóibín spoke about creating solutions. An Taisce could have created solutions, but has not done so because it is faceless. Nobody could find it or talk to it. An Taisce was a law unto itself. No organisation in this country should be a law unto itself. I accept that An Taisce must abide by the directives that exist. When one deals with planning matters at council level, one gets a chance to sit down and talk to someone. One sometimes loses the battle and one has to accept that. In this case, there was nobody to talk to. In most of the planning cases in which An Taisce got involved, it made a decision and it walked away. It destroyed people's lives. There was no understanding. No one came in.

An Taisce seems to have a strange rule about beautiful country houses and farm families. People are trying to return to rural communities. We are trying to rebuild communities. An Taisce seems to have rules in certain circumstances, but it does not seem to have any rules governing solar farms, for example. We have not heard much from An Taisce about solar farms. There is quite a lot of frustration about wind farms.

Mr. Lumley mentioned the kelp farm in Bantry. It is alleged that this 1,880-acre project could cause serious destruction to our nature. It is going ahead, but the once-off house in the rural community will be stopped. Why can there be a rule for one and not for another? Where does An Taisce come into play? Where is the vision for nature in that? I do not see any such vision, to be quite honest.

Mr. Lumley said that 40% of marine species are being overfished. This exact kind of report came out ten years ago when the inshore fishermen were chased off from fishing salmon. Ten years later, we are told that there are still no salmon in the water. The fishermen have been chased off the water. Where were the reports there? I do not entirely agree with many of the reports that come out. I would like to know whether there should have been a cull on seals. Such things should have been looked at. Maybe the inshore fishermen should not have been chased off the water. The decision in question was meant to be reviewed after seven years, but ten years on there has been no review whatsoever.

Burning and other issues have been mentioned. Gougane Barra is in my constituency. Many more areas in my constituency were basically destroyed. Any nature-minded person would be frustrated and annoyed at the like of it. I would put the blame for that solely in the hands of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. Do any of the witnesses realise what the Department did to the farmers? It chased the farmers. It fined them tens of thousands of euro for having gorse - for having pure nature - on their land. That is why frustration set in. They basically had guns put to their heads.

Many fingers have been pointed at farmers. Many farmers have never set fire to these hills. They would not do the like of it. They love nature. Why would they set fire to their own animals, their own fencing and their own wires? The Department's vision is to fine farmers if their farms are burned, even if they did not set their farms on fire in the first place. There is a complete misunderstanding of farming. Farmers are being accused. The finger is being pointed at the farmer for starting these fires even though they have little or nothing to do with it. When I spoke to officials from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in Portlaoise four years ago, I said they would be the cause of an inferno in this country and sure enough they were. Sadly, they did not realise that I was right.

Mr. Lumley suggested that the rural environment protection scheme was not great. I think it was a good move in the right direction because it created habitats. Unfortunately, the farmer then got fined by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine for having a habitat. The whole thing is like a chicken and egg game. There is no real understanding of the farmer. The rural environment protection scheme had its own use. It assisted birds and other forms of nature.

Deputy Healy-Rae spoke about verge-cutting. The frustration down my side of the country is the same as the frustration Deputy Healy-Rae hears in his constituency. It is frightening to travel in a rural community. It is quite scary to come around a bend and see two or three children stuck in briars trying to get away from a car. It is unbelievable, to be honest. The witnesses do not understand. They have to visit the country so they will understand. I said to someone recently that if they want to talk about farming, they should wear wellingtons. If the witnesses want to talk about rural Ireland, and really understand the way of living there, they have to wear wellingtons.

Chairman: I thank both representatives of An Taisce for attending this afternoon's meeting. I know they have to head off early. We greatly appreciate their input. Míle buíochas.

Mr. Ian Lumley: If I had been aware that housing, which has been mentioned by Deputies Michael Collins and Danny Healy-Rae, was going to be raised, I would have brought the facts and figures with me. The planning system grants permission for thousands of one-off houses annually. When planning permission for a house is refused, there has to be a difficulty with location, water quality or traffic safety. One cannot expect every application for a house on a

site to be granted simply because somebody wants to put it there. Very often, the issue is that a family member has another location for a house. The council should be taking a proactive role in finding serviced suitable sites in other areas where those situations arise. We have actively advocated that policy in many documents down the years.

We fully support the Deputy's concern that we have proper guidelines for solar wind farms and other developments. Some of the initial wind farms caused a major issue as they were developed in a deep peat area and caused peat slides. A very serious issue happened in this area in recent months, resulting in a fatality. There is a need for more effective planning and construction guidelines. Solar development, which is part of the desirable energy mix that we need for the future to get away from carbon sources, needs to be given proper national guidelines, which are not yet in place. The new Department with responsibility for planning was very much caught on the hop on this issue because a new industry has emerged, which is producing its own guidelines, but there should be independent national guidelines separate from the individual sector.

On the issue relating to kelp farming, an advertisement for what is a potentially very problematic development was posted in a local Garda station and most people were not aware of it. We need much more effective structures, information and consultation provisions in order that people, as well as environmental organisations, are aware of what is happening in the area.

The figure with regard to over-fishing comes from the European Commission's fish stock monitoring data. I can supply the Deputy with that information afterwards. There is no evidence that seals are making any significant or major contribution to the collapse of fish stocks in the Irish Sea. The collapse of successive fish stocks has extended over many centuries. In the late medieval period we had major inshore herring fishing which we exported to Europe. Pilchards and sardines were being fished off the coast of Cork as they were off the coast of Cornwall and were also exported to Europe. Those stocks collapsed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The history of human intervention with fish species has been that of over-exploitation of a particular species in an area and then moving on to another with new trawling techniques. We have cited the international fisheries biologist, Daniel Pauly, in our more detailed submission, and he outlines the effect of this. Every time we move on to a new baseline, we forget the abundance of fish life that there was once in the Irish Sea, which is now left to shrimp farming, which is a bottom feeder, with the main species having been fished beyond their replacement propagation capacity.

There needs to be a much more effective community action on burning to identify what is causing this and who are the culprits. It is a criminal matter and there needs to be a properly resourced investigation to get to the bottom of it, to find out who was behind of it, to have prosecutions and an adequate deterrent for the future.

Chairman: Mr. Lumley's time is up and I will bring him back in later if he wishes.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: I thank the Chairman for the opportunity to speak at the committee. Mr. Starrett referred to legislation on land use in America and England. I hope he is not talking about whittling down Irish private property rights, which are stronger here than they are in most other countries. I would like him to clarify that.

He touched on the success of the Burren. However, it has been a success following a disaster resulting from the impact of scientists when they said that the cows should be taken off the Burren. Then they listened to the farmers and the people from the local area who told them

how to manage it. That is when the Burren became a success. It should be acknowledged that people with many letters after their names contributed to destroying the Burren. I ask Mr. Starrett to clarify those two matters.

Mr. Lumley and I go back a long way. I would like him to correct a few matters for the record. One is that no turf is cut within Glenveagh National Park. I got such a report a few years ago and got another such report this year. I drove three hours to check on this and that activity is taking place outside the national park. I want that clarified because it is unfair to mislead the committee.

Mr. Lumley spoke about the reduction in activity on raised bogs that has taken place over the course of the seven years of reporting. When Mr. Fernandez did his report there was a reduction. However, it should be noted for the record of the committee that it is now acknowledged, and scientists have also come up with this, that we were probably 40% wrong in terms of our active raised bog habitat when we started reporting it first. If we were 40% wrong at the beginning, we could not be right any of the way through reporting on that. That needs clarification.

If one sees a hen harrier in one's field, one had better get rid of it quickly. It is sad for farmers who have grown up with nature whose land has been designated for the protection of the hen harrier as they are not able to plant trees, clean their drains or farm their land and their land is worthless. Those are the facts of having one's land designated for the protection of the hen harrier.

As a result of environmental rules and our failure to clean rivers we have suffered the loss of the corncrake and they have drowned. Mr. Lumley knows Mr. Michael Silke well and has heard everything he has said. What has happened with the corncrake is disgusting. We thought we were smarter but environmental rules have destroyed the corncrake.

There is participation among people around the country to protect the curlew. As Deputies Danny Healy-Rae and Michael Collins pointed out, other species are killing them on the ground. Farmers are willing to co-operate. Mr. Lumley, in his submission, spoke about the Common Agricultural Policy, penalties and the bad way of doing things. A farmer is the protector of rural Ireland. It is not someone, to cite the title of one of Nanci Griffith's songs, "From a Distance" who wants to preach about it. We come from a managed landscape and respect needs to be shown to those farmers.

Mr. Lumley spoke about high natural value areas. The reality, as Deputy Collins pointed out, with respect to burning is that farmers in different parts of the country had to destock their sheep. If fewer sheep are grazing a large area, they will eat one area of vegetation that is sweet and leave the rest. Unfortunately, officials from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine inspect the land and cut such a farmer's single payment. If 20% of the area is cut, then it is all gone. That is the reality of what is happening in rural parts of Ireland.

Mr. Lumley spoke about the Peatlands Council in terms of raised bogs and compensation. The compensation was in place before the Peatlands Council was formed. No relocation has been done since Mr. Lumley or any other group met the Peatlands Council, and I sat on it for a while. The Turf Cutters and Contractors Association, TCCA, has a representative and the association is working with the national parks. We can be critical of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, and I often was, but it is trying to make a genuine effort, along with scientific evidence in this area. I would like Mr. Lumley to state that he will back this up because a resolution can be found to this. Ten years ago, I made the point that out of 3,000 acres, 100 acres may not be

of any use for conservation but may be of use to the turf cutting communities. That is the way forward. I would welcome the views of the witness on that issue.

In regard to the pearl mussel, it has been moved in rivers in order for the river to be cleaned and put back again, ironically, and everything was hunky-dory. People now think there cannot even be the shadow of a bridge near the pearl mussel or it will disappear or die. While the submission of the witness is aspirational, if one was to live in the world of the witness, one would think that everything has disappeared. There is a reference to the natterjack toad, which is a frog, to put it in simple English. It is unbelievable and delusional for anyone to say he or she will do a survey of frogs in this country. I am aware that the witness has not said that. John Gormley was the first person to announce it. I do not understand how frogs would be counted. Rural dwellers have a good idea how well frogs are doing because they are in that environment every day. However, they will not tell anyone because An Taisce is the scourge of rural Ireland because of objections it makes to projects and the way in which it does so. That is a sad thing to have to say. I ask An Taisce to rethink the way it is going.

As I said to the witness, currently 50% of all water extraction in Ireland for which Irish Water is responsible is coming out of designated areas where An Taisce has lodged objections for people to have drinking water. A total of 40% of the outflow of sewage would be going in to a designated area. Even if the sewage is 99% treated, that would not be good enough but raw sewage is currently being pumped in places the witness and I know. I ask An Taisce to rethink how it is doing things. It might have an open door in Europe but it will never have an open door or a welcome in rural Ireland unless it works with the people who live and farm in the countryside and respect it every day of the week.

Mr. Ian Lumley: There is detailed information on the Glenveigh National Park issue in-----

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: Forget about-----

Chairman: In fairness, there have been ten minutes-----

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: I am dealing with facts. The record of this committee-----

Chairman: All members have been given ten minutes.

Mr. Ian Lumley: The information is based on the work of former director of the Irish Wildlife Trust, Mr. Pádraic Fogarty, who has investigated cutting in Glenveigh National Park and used GPS data to determine that it is inside the national park boundary.

In terms of the raised bog issue, since the Peatlands Council was established and the compensation and conservation plan put in place, major additional studies have been conducted which have established how vulnerable the less than 1% of raised bogs remaining are.

In regard to the hen harrier, An Taisce has advocated area-based approaches for hen harrier areas which would be integrated with high nature value farming and appropriate support schemes.

The loss of the corncrake has mainly resulted from changes in traditional agricultural practice and a move away from hay meadows. The curlew is currently the subject of an action plan and we hope that a suitable scheme with good ecological advice can be put in place in conjunction with farming organisations and landowners.

Above all, we stress that we can only work together by working with people. However, the

issue of water quality and protecting river water catchments from flooding is not just of concern to landowners. Biodiversity and nature conservation is a necessity and a concern for us all. That is why we must have a better co-operative relationship, both urban and rural, in meeting these issues. An Taisce is always open to being part of any forum. The only prospect of progress is if we can work together. The data is in front of us. We know the climate challenges we face. We know where biodiversity loss and pressures are and we should work together on an area, community and co-operative basis, talk to each other and make progress on these issues.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: I asked about Irish Water.

Chairman: Perhaps the witness might address that issue.

Mr. Ian Lumley: I cannot speak for Irish Water.

Chairman: Maybe Mr. Starrett wishes to speak to that issue.

Mr. Michael Starrett: I do not wish to address the Irish Water point but there were two other issues to which I would like to respond. I hope I have given an understanding that the Heritage Council is concerned with ensuring that it is working at community level to find a good way of doing things, whatever that may be.

In regard to the question on legislation and property rights, I am very Irish and very well aware of the issues. The Heritage Council proposals are nothing to do with whittling down anything such as that. It is about enabling and empowering communities, including landowners, to develop something for themselves. This is a democracy and we work through legislation. I have said that we are very weak on that form of enabling and empowering legislation. We have very strong regulation and imposition legislation but need enabling and empowering legislation.

In regard to the Burren, I have said that the National Biodiversity Data Centre was the first time there was quality data available to those scientists. Many of those decisions were therefore based on informed opinion. I am glad to say that Ireland is now in the position that much more informed decisions can be made and hopefully that the types of disaster, to use the Deputy's word, that happened will not happen again. The Burren Life project is a shining example from which we could all learn, whether it was the Burren IFA, Michael Davoren or whoever else has driven it forward. A contribution was also made by a very good scientist, Mr. Brendan Dunford, who was sent down there and understood the situation and the Heritage Council was there at the outset.

Chairman: I will allow members ask another round of questions. They should ask all questions together, after which the witnesses will respond. All members know that I do not protect witnesses in any way. All Deputies and Senators should be able to ask questions that are important to them and their constituents. However, when questions are asked, that should be done in a respectful manner because the witnesses are messengers. They do not make the laws. The laws enforced throughout the country are made in Leinster House. Deputies and Senators are responsible for any law that is being used with regard to decisions around the country. When members ask questions, they should do so in a respectful fashion.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I had to leave the committee meeting briefly because I had to speak in the Dáil. When I was going out the door, I heard Mr. Lumley talking about badgers and saying badgers had TB and he appeared to be worried about that. One does not get milk from badgers. Farmers cannot survive on badgers. Badgers spread TB to other animals. Farmers

can be taken before the courts if they are found to be netting badgers, which is unfair because for a couple of lorries to have to take away 50 or 60 of a farmer's cows because the cows have caught TB is denying the farmer his or her livelihood. That is very sad and very hard for the farmer. Deer also spread TB. Large-scale deer culls need to take place.

In regard to curlews, magpies and grey crows are cleaning out their nests and those of pheasants.

The witness referred to the rivers. God almighty, to say that we cannot clear out the Shannon or the Flesk River in Kerry, what frame of mind are people in at all? Do people think we can raise the houses? Do they think we can raise the roads? Do they realise the hardship 22 families faced in Glenflesk a few years ago because the Flesk River has not been cleaned out for 30 or 40 years? One man's last trip out of his house was in a boat. His name is Paddy Healy and the last trip out of his house was when the fire brigade had to take him from his own house in a boat. To think that someone would suggest that we cannot clean out the river is disrespectful.

As Deputy Fitzmaurice said, farmers are being penalised for allowing their land to become overgrown. Maybe some of them have burned it but in the cases that happened this year, we were afraid that others might have set fire to these places. The local farmers cannot be blamed, or no one can prove it. There should be a policy that anyone who has forestry opens a fire belt around it. Farmers who have material that would burn ought to have a firebelt around their place so that the fire cannot come in from another farm. I have been propagating this idea at local council level and here. Coillte used to help the farmer locally to do what was known as controlled burning. We need to return to that. If farmers were not penalised, they might not burn these places. The fact is they cannot take a mowing machine, lawn-mower or hedge cutter into some of these places because the terrain is so rough and so bad, yet a Department official can say it is overgrown and cut the farmer's payment. As Deputy Fitzmaurice said, if more than 20% of the area is found to be overgrown, the farmer loses 100% of their payment, not 20%.

Mr. Lumley said agriculture was the lead threat to Irish biodiversity. Farmers and landowners are the best custodians of the land. They had to fight to hand it down to their sons and in many places are paying down large loans in order to hold on to their places. They have not and will not do anything harmful to their places. The witnesses spoke about climate change. I will argue until I die that only one person has control of the climate. There have been changing patterns in climate going back over the years, before there was ever a combustible engine. No one can disprove that and that is a fact.

Mr. Lumley spoke of the house and that he was not aware of it. I can tell him about the people who were denied the house and the halving of the 365 acres. I have no problem naming Michael J. Horgan, a constituent, a serial complainant who denied them the right-----

Chairman: Deputy Danny Healy-Rae was not here at the beginning but I say it at the start of every meeting that if a person is not here, members are not entitled to use his or her name. It is the same as if a fellow was in a meeting in Kerry today, and was saying something negative about the Deputy's name, it would not be fair because he has a right to be able to defend himself. When we name people who are not here, we take away their right to defend themselves. This meeting is broadcast and recorded. We cannot be anybody's judge and jury so I ask the Deputy not to use people's names who are not here.

The Deputy's five minutes are gone so I will ask Deputy Collins to speak.

Deputy Michael Collins: I will be brief as we have already discussed many of the issues I raised. How do we strike a balance and find a solution in regard to An Taisce? I said it was faceless, has broken the hearts of many, has caused extreme frustration and is very much disliked in rural Ireland, to say the least. I have found no one who will say a good word about it. How do we find a solution? Mr. Lumley did not touch on that in his reply. Can we find a solution, or work together to find one? Can An Taisce come out from behind the iron curtain and speak to the people? In county councils, when talking about planning, one might argue a point, but one will have someone to argue with. One might lose one's argument but at least it can be discussed and a decision cannot be made that has an effect on people's lives but no one has a say.

There was a suggestion that the Department might have been caught regarding solar farms. It very much looks like that. I have a feeling that it likes being caught because it has been notified about it for quite some time but is doing nothing about it. There has to be a reason for it. An Taisce was also cut off regarding kelp. The notification was put in the newspaper. There was a planning application for 1,880 acres. It will have a devastating effect on tourism in Ventry, in Sheep's Head and in the Bearra peninsula. Why did An Taisce not object? It is talking about nature and all sorts of different things but this is going to cause absolute destruction, or it is alleged that it will. Where was An Taisce when that advertisement came out because if it was a small once-off house, it would have been on the ball straight away? It should be no different than if it was 1,880 acres in the water.

Deputy Healy-Rae mentioned the shooting ban and Mr. Lumley touched on it in his reply. In regard to foxes, the overnight situation is crazy. Many people have contacted us about that. I do not know who came up with that idea. It is yet another dreamed up idea. I would like some answers to these questions.

Mr. Ian Lumley: I will refer Deputy Healy-Rae's remarks on climate to my colleague, Mr. Phil Kearney, who is the chairman of An Taisce's climate committee. Given that the climate issue is of such overriding importance, he might set out some points.

Mr. Phil Kearney: To introduce a dose of reality, I appreciate that Deputies are fierce defenders of their local areas but we are defenders of the larger biosphere, of biodiversity in general. On resources, we have two full-time staff, one ecologist and one planner. Their joint incomes are less than the salary of a Deputy. Mr. Lumley is a volunteer and I and my fellow board members are volunteers. It is a compliment to us that we should be the focus of so much critique and attack with so few people.

Mr. Lumley has suggested that we would wish to collaborate. That is a genuine offer and promise. Please talk to us. It is difficult for the two staff to go around the country, so I would not like anyone to be under any illusions about the scale of our operation but it is clearly having an impact.

The difference in the 70 years of An Taisce's operation is that when it was initiated, it was reasonable to assume that things would continue in the future as they had been. This is no longer the case. The scale of the unprecedented threat which we now face, and which is confirmed by all significant scientists, is of such an order that we can no longer assume that the things we hold dear will still be there in the future. Members talked about a heritage plan over a five-year duration, but the latest scientific information suggests that in three years, we will fail to achieve the goals set by the Paris Agreement. The urgency is of that order. I encourage members to realise that we cannot assume that things will continue into the future as they are. We have to

act urgently. This is a Government responsibility and as public representatives, I ask members to support that urgency.

Chairman: We had the last round of questions.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: I did not ask about Irish Water. I mentioned 50% extraction, Lough Talt in Sligo and other places around the country and outflow points. I said that many are in designated areas. When one looks to put in new machinery to get better quality drinking water for people, An Taisce objects. Will this be the policy? That is my question. An Taisce is not worried about Irish Water and I am not dealing with it. That is a debate to be held somewhere else. Would the witnesses support controlled burning by a co-op under an RSS in certain rural areas where there might not be a lot of employment? Burning in areas of control is good for getting wildlife back as it regenerates. The 2025 agricultural policy has to go ahead because if we do not keep people working we will see what we saw in 2009, that is, 240,000 people leaving the country.

In response to Mr. Kearney, we may be on good wages but we do maybe 100 hours a week, which many people would not do. We have to deal with the people in our villages, our parishes, our provinces and our country. He said we would not reach the targets and that is only common sense because they were delusional.

Chairman: There are obviously differences of opinion. My own view is that climate change is real and is man-made. There are oceans of scientific proof of this and not only is it costing this State hundreds of millions of euro on an annual basis to deal with the accelerated level of climate change, but there are probably tens of thousands of people losing their lives due to climate change so it is massively important to take carbon out of the energy system and providing for carbon capture in nature. Solar farms are a really important part of that process and are far less invasive than the wind farms that have sprung up around the country.

Mr. Ian Lumley: I will conclude on some of the civic issues raised. Badgers were raised by Deputy Healy-Rae but the research remains unclear on the extent to which infection from badgers is passing to cattle herds. We mentioned the pilot scheme for the inoculation of badgers and this should be actively looked at as a future response. I cannot speak for the River Flesk but some very unrealistic proposals have been circulated for the flood levels in the Shannon, involving dredging. The Shannon has a large watershed catchment and substantial rainwater flow from tributaries which drain into it. There may be areas where some action is needed, subject to ecological appraisal, but the answer to flood relief on our river catchments is to look at best practice which is emerging in other European countries, which uses natural flood management. The report commissioned by Friends of the Earth Ireland suggests adopting an ecosystems approach to managing flood risk, which has multiple other benefits. On the issue of burning, we are all agreed on the need for collective action and for enforcement and if there is any justification for burning it needs to be done with proper control, supervision and ecological advice.

I was asked about the greatest impact of declining Irish biodiversity and the status report into habitats and species. This is in the NPWS document - it is not something we are saying. Deputy Collins raised the issue of kelp. While we have a very elaborate system for the advertisement of planning applications, with site notices, local authority websites etc., people in Bantry Bay missed out, as did the environmental organisations such as ourselves. The difficulty, as my colleague explained, is that we are very slim on resources and do not get any public funding for carrying out our role as an environmental organisation, which is to look at planning applications or consents in agriculture and fisheries and various big or small developments in

various other areas.

Deputy Fitzmaurice raised the issue of water. We are promoting and supporting a catchment-based approach to water and managing the watershed, to ensure there is no problematic run-off. In the past, overgrazing of sheep caused an issue for water catchments and burning is clearly very damaging to surface water drainage and water catchments. I am happy to talk to Deputy Fitzmaurice about certain cases but I am not clear about the issue because everything to do with the relationship of the environment, ecology and human settlement is based on maintaining clean surface water and groundwater, to be able to extract drinking water from resources in appropriate locations and in an appropriate way. There is an assessment process to ensure, for example, that lakewater abstraction is not drawn down below certain levels. I am not at all clear as to what concerns the Deputy raised but I would be very happy to discuss them afterwards, as we always are to talk about individual issues with local communities, Members of the Oireachtas and local councillors.

Chairman: I greatly appreciate the fact that the witnesses came before us today. I thank them for the work they are doing. There is no doubt that we seem to extinguish one element of our natural environment every day through our actions as a people so we need to conserve our natural environment. The small farmer in this country is an endangered species to some extent, and many of the threats to them come not from the people in this room but from the market economy we are building in the European Union. If we hope to achieve the objectives the committee and the witnesses have laid out, we need to work in partnership in the future.

Sitting suspended at 4.38 p.m. and resumed in private session at 4.41 p.m.

The joint committee adjourned at 5.02 p.m. until 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 20 September 2017.