

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM CHULTÚR, OIDHREACHT AGUS GAELTACHT

JOINT COMMITTEE ON CULTURE, HERITAGE AND THE GAELTACHT

Dé Céadaoin, 2 Deireadh Fómhair 2019

Wednesday, 2 October 2019

The Joint Committee met at 1.30 p.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair/Members present:

Michael Collins,	Maura Hopkins.
Danny Healy-Rae,	
Éamon Ó Cuív,	
Noel Rock,*	
Niamh Smyth.	

* In éagmais/In the absence of Deputy Martin Heydon.

I láthair/In attendance: Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice.

Teachta/Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire sa Chathaoir/in the Chair

Business of Joint Committee

Chairman: We have a quorum so we can commence our meeting in public session. I propose to suspend briefly to allow the Minister, Minister of State and their officials to take their seats. We will deal with various housekeeping matters in private session at the end of the meeting.

The joint committee suspended at 1.40 p.m. and resumed at 1.42 p.m.

Mid-Year Review: Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Chairman: I advise members and witnesses to turn off their mobile phones as they interfere with the sound system and hence the broadcasting of this meeting. An chúis leis an gcuinniú seo ná chun an Vóta Meastacháin 33, Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta a phlé leis an Aire Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta. The purpose of today's meeting is to discuss the mid-year review of the 2019 Estimates for Vote 33, in respect of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, with the Minister and Minister of State at said Department. I welcome the Minister, Deputy Madigan, the Minister of State, Deputy Kyne, and the officials from the Department to this meeting. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire, an Aire Stáit, agus na hoifigí as ucht a bheith anseo agus na hábhair a chur os ár gcomhair.

Before I ask them to address the meeting, I remind the witnesses that by virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, they are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to this committee. However, if they are directed to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and 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 asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise nor make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. Any opening statements or other documents that have been submitted to the committee may be published on the committee's website after this meeting. Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the Houses or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

As members will be aware, Vote 33 - Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, comprises four programmes as follows: programme A, culture; programme B, heritage; programme C, Irish language, Gaeltacht and islands; and programme D, North-South co-operation. The Minister will make her opening statement covering programmes A, B and D and the Minister of State will subsequently speak. I will invite member's questions on programmes A, B and D. On conclusion of those questions, the Minister of State will answer questions on programme C. Freagróidh sé ceisteanna ar a chlár suí agus ansin beidh ceisteanna againn ar an gclár sin. Members should indicate the subhead number to which they are referring when asking questions. The list of subheads has been circulated.

I now invite the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Deputy Madigan to make her opening statement.

Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan): I con-

gratulate the Chairman on his recent appointment and wish him every success in his role. As Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, I am pleased to have this opportunity to address the committee regarding the 2019 mid-year review of expenditure for my Department. The functions and responsibilities of my Department are many and diverse, ranging from support for the arts and culture, conservation and safeguarding of our heritage and language, to supporting sustainable island communities. This year has been a very busy one for my Department with many notable achievements, including a new impetus to the promotion of our culture and creativity both at home and abroad. The work of the agencies under the remit of my Department such as the Arts Council, our national cultural institutions and Screen Ireland, goes from strength to strength with innovative exhibitions, inclusive education and outreach programmes and an ever-growing diversity of creative engagement initiatives. In addition, ambitious capital investment projects as part of Project Ireland 2040 are either under way or planned at many of these agencies. A number of programmes and projects funded by or managed directly by my Department also continue to yield very positive results, including the work of Culture Ireland, the expansion of the per cent for arts scheme, the extension of the social welfare scheme for self-employed artists in conjunction with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the expansion of the Creative Schools initiative in partnership with the Department of Education and Skills and the ongoing development of Cruinniú na nÓg, the first national day celebrating children and young people's creativity.

The new national heritage plan, Heritage Ireland 2030, will guide our heritage priorities and investment over the next decade and beyond. In March of this year, a series of 70 public workshops on the plan came to a conclusion. There was an unprecedented level of response and engagement, with over 2,000 organisations and individuals making submissions on what heritage means to them. The need to address heritage impacts, the loss of biodiversity and the erosion of our heritage in general are very strong themes to emerge from this consultative process, as is a strong call for support for education and youth engagement with heritage. The analysis of the submissions is ongoing within my Department, laying the foundations for what will become the overarching policy for Ireland's built and natural heritage for years to come.

In terms of our language and islands, good progress continues to be recorded on the implementation of the five year action plan for the Irish language. Supports for the Irish language and our Gaeltacht and island communities continue to be provided and enhanced to the greatest extent possible.

This year has also seen progress on a number of key projects under my Department's investment plan as part of Project Ireland 2040. I spoke to the committee earlier this year about the potentially transformative impact of this investment plan, bringing together all aspects of our culture and our heritage, built, natural and linguistic, under a single programme of investment with an holistic vision. As Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, I look forward to continuing progress under this investment plan and indeed across all strands of my Department's work programme during the remainder of the year and into future years.

In terms of my appearance here today, members have been provided with a report by my Department outlining details of performance and expenditure across all programme areas during the first half of 2019. The 2019 Revised Estimates provides for a gross allocation of just under €339 million for the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in 2019. In addition, a further €700,000 in capital funding was carried over from the 2018 provision. Gross total expenditure incurred by my Department in the period to 30 June 2019 was €153.2 million. This expenditure represents 94% of profiled expenditure and 45% of the overall 2019 gross

allocation. In addition, the capital carry-over sum of €700,000 was expended in full. This expenditure has increased to €205.7 million as at 31 August 2019, representing 97% of profiled expenditure and 61% of the 2019 gross allocation for my Department.

My colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Kyne, and I will speak about the highlights in each programme area during the first half of 2019. I will commence with the culture programme. I will be happy to expand on any matter members may wish to raise.

Total funding of just under €189 million is provided in 2019 for the culture programme. Some 95% of this funding, or approximately €180 million, is used to directly support arts and culture in Ireland. Gross direct programme expenditure on culture, up to 30 June, was €86.4 million, representing 48% of the corresponding 2019 programme allocation. This percentage had increased to 63% as at 31 August. As committee members are aware, a cornerstone of my Department's culture investment programme under Project Ireland 2040 is the €460 million being set aside for the renovation of the national cultural institutions, the protection of the national collections and the enhancement of visitor experiences and services. While much of the work in 2019 continues to be focused on the appraisal, planning and design of projects, the first phase of enabling works to prepare for the National Archives' repository redevelopment was completed earlier this year, with many of the State's papers and documents being moved to temporary storage in order to facilitate the preliminary site works. The project is intended to deliver new purpose-built storage facilities at the National Archives premises on Bishop Street, Dublin 8 and will build in the potential to develop and construct additional storage in the future.

On the audiovisual industry, European Commission approval was received to extend the section 481 film tax credit for four years, from its original end date of 31 December 2020 to 31 December 2024. This will provide certainty for production companies on the future availability of the credit and helps to ensure the Irish film industry will continue to grow. Also in support of the Government's ambition to make Ireland a global hub for the production of film, TV drama and animation, new film regulations aimed at supporting broader regional development of the audiovisual sector in Ireland were introduced by the Revenue Commissioners earlier this year. The regional film development uplift, announced as part of budget 2019, will be available to productions being undertaken substantially in areas designated as assisted regions, obliging production companies to make training and skills development a key part of their projects and ensuring the film industry will benefit from the additional activity long after these productions have concluded.

Cruinniú na nÓg is the first national day celebrating children and young people's creativity. It took place again in June this year, with a programme of more than 750 free creative activities for under-18s across the country. Although only in its second year, the initiative under my Department's Creative Ireland programme is already a great success and a firm fixture in the culture calendar. Its success is due in no small part to the really impressive range of events for all ages and interests curated by the culture and creativity teams across the 31 local authorities. Events included workshops, exhibitions and performances and were kicked off by our Cruinniú na nÓg ambassadors, who are Sarah Fitzgerald in Cork and Adam Cunningham in Galway city. Ben de Barra's first film "The Happy Garden" was premiered in Dublin as part of Cruinniú.

This year has also seen the appointment of cultural ambassadors from Ireland's arts and culture community to promote Ireland globally as part of the Government's Global Ireland 2025 initiative and provide advice on and an input into strategic cultural initiatives and participate in key events and projects. Martin Hayes, Shelley McNamara, Yvonne Farrell, Ruth Negga and Paul Muldoon all accepted the role of cultural ambassador in January this year for a period of

three years. I greatly appreciate each cultural ambassador's acceptance of the role. In continuing to do what they do best they will be among Ireland's greatest representatives globally.

At the start of the year I was pleased to announce the publication of the guidance of the expert advisory group on the decade of centenaries, 1919 to 1923. Consistent with this advice, I am committed to ensuring the State's approach to remembering all those who lost their lives during the struggle for independence and the significant events and themes associated with this period will be based on the respectful, sensitive, proportionate and authentic approach that has become the hallmark of my Department's decade of centenaries commemorative programme. The collaborative approach between the State, the local authority network and community organisations to the commemorative programme has been critical in its successful delivery to date. To that end, I was very pleased to be able to announce a funding allocation of €10,000 for every local authority in 2019 to support their role in leading the development of commemorative activities at county level under the community strand of the decade of centenaries programme.

On the culture programme, it would be remiss of me not to mention Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture. I was very pleased to launch the culture programme under Galway 2020 last month. The programme presents a wealth of artistic talent inspired by and nurtured in Ireland, as well as the work of artists from other cultures. It represents both Galway city and county, including the islands, spreading across Ireland and adopting an all-Ireland approach. Galway 2020 is supported by the Government through my Department. It is recognised not alone as an EU event but also one which fits within the Government's Global Ireland initiative which aims to increase Ireland's global profile by 2025. The programme promises to be an exciting one, including many free events, and will I hope attract visitors from around the world who will experience at first hand the many and varied aspects of Irish culture.

I will be happy to expand on any issue members would like to raise about any programme area.

Chairman: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister. We will proceed to take questions on programme A, culture, to which members should restrict their questions.

Deputy Michael Collins: I welcome Deputy Ó Laoghaire to his role. As Vice Chairman, I look forward to working closely with him.

The Minister has outlined a significant budget and many projects, some of which have been ongoing for the past 12 months since the previous budget. She said the total budget was €339 million. I am not sure what the exact figures were for last year, but the Minister received a lot of money from the rural regeneration fund for various projects. Therefore, she has a significant budget. There were 43 projects in County Cork. While many communities in my constituency were involved in various projects, none of them received any funds. I am not sure whether it was a total of €8 million that the Minister received from the rural regeneration fund, probably rightly so, but with an overall budget of €339 million, it does not look good for it to be topped up from the rural regeneration fund. That is my take on the view among the general public and the powers be should take notice. The Department is obviously very powerful and well staffed. I am aware of one rural community organisation that spent €500,000 in trying to get a project off the ground and was refused funding. Given the current level of funding available to the Department, it is not a level playing pitch. That is something that needs to be addressed. The Department is entitled to apply for such funding, but it is of major concern. However, that is not the issue about which I wish to talk.

Mid-way through her presentation the Minister said she would try to address any matter under her umbrella members would like to raise. One such issue is the hedge-cutting Bill.

Chairman: That Bill is not material to the current discussion.

Deputy Michael Collins: I know that, but the bottom line is that it is a very serious issue. I wish to clarify one point. I was chairing the meeting when we voted-----

Chairman: I ask the Deputy to give way. If the matter is relevant in any way, it can be raised when we come to discuss the heritage programme.

Deputy Michael Collins: It is. The Minister was before us at the time. We held a democratic vote and the matter was dealt with in the Seanad and the Dáil and at the committee. One week after we started the summer break the Minister broke that rule.

Chairman: The Deputy will have an opportunity to raise the matter when we are discussing the heritage programme. If he has specific questions about programme A, culture, this is his opportunity to ask them.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I will deal with the culture question.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: If the Minister is dealing with it-----

Chairman: I will call the Deputy afterwards.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: The Minister will answer the same question again.

Chairman: She will not answer the specific question right now. She will deal with it, if at all, when we come to discuss the heritage programme. I invite her to respond to the question about culture.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I will have no difficulty in dealing with heritage questions when we come to the next section. The Deputies can ask anything they like.

Specifically with reference to culture, we fund numerous projects in County Cork. Most recently, we announced an allocation of €350,000 for the Briery Gap Culture Centre which, as the Deputy knows, closed for a number of years following a fire. We hope to get it back up and running. It is located in the middle of Macroom and will add a huge amount to the town. It will go a long way towards helping the community in the area.

We also fund the Crawford Art Gallery. This year we gave it €76,000 which helped it to open on Sundays. It is doing phenomenally well. Being able to open an extra day has had a transformative effect.

The Department gives many other grants, including to the Cork Butter Museum, the Sirius Arts Centre, the West Cork Arts Centre in Skibbereen, St. Peter's in Cork, LeisureWorld, the Triskel Arts Centre, Banteer Old School Heritage and Drama Trust, Conna Community Council, the Cyclone Theatre Company, Wandesford Quay, the Everyman Palace, Cork Opera House, Firkin Crane, the National Sculpture Factory in Cork, the Graffiti Theatre Company, the Glen Theatre, the Cork Arts Theatre, the Laharn Community Centre and Cloyne Diocesan Centre. Under the national development plan and Project 2040, the Crawford Art Gallery will receive €22 million, which is significant. I hope this addresses the Deputy's concerns. I will come back to the heritage question.

Chairman: I call Deputy Danny Healy-Rae to ask questions specifically about culture, not heritage.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I will have an opportunity to raise culture questions.

Chairman: The Deputy will.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: Some festivals and small local events were not held this year because of insurance costs. Will the Minister see whether she can do anything to help local people to retain their identity by doing something about the provision of funding to help with insurance costs or having a group fund in order that all festivals could move under one umbrella? The Minister and the Department could help in that regard. All that is left in many rural places is a one or two-day event such as world fiddle day in Scartaglin. The only funding it received this year was €1,000 from Kerry County Council. While those involved were appreciative, they did not feel it was enough for the job they did in bringing fiddle players from all over the country to Scartaglin for what is a massive event. In many places, including Kenmare, Sneem and even Kilgarvan, the big problem is sourcing or meeting requests for insurance cover. They will all be wiped out. Given everything else that has been taken from them, including post offices, Garda stations, local shops and service stations, many local communities have very little left with which to retain their identity. They have been trying their best. This year some of them failed to hold events because of the cost of insurance. Will the Minister see what she can do to help them to retain their identity?

My other questions are more appropriate to the discussion on heritage.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I will answer the heritage question after dealing with the questions about culture.

Insurance cover does not come within my remit, but it is a source of concern for the Government. We are doing everything we can to look at it. We offer support to festivals under the small summer festival scheme run by the Department. Anybody is entitled to apply on an annual basis and grants are allocated accordingly. We are very supportive of local festivals, as is the Arts Council. Therefore, there are two separate streams. There are some arts centres in County Kerry which we look after. They include St. John's Theatre and Arts Centre in Listowel Square, the cultural centre in Killarney, Oidhreacht Chorca Dhuibhne, Siamsa Tíre in Tralee which is very well known, the Cahersiveen Community Resource Centre, Teach Siamsa Finuge, Teach Siamsa na Carraige and An Daingean Boatyard Arts and Cultural Centre. The festivals programme is always open for applications for funding. If the Deputy knows of anybody who wants to apply, he can let us know.

Deputy Niamh Smyth: I have a number of questions about culture. The creative schools initiative involves a welcome partnership with the Department of Education and Skills. With reference to the higher implementation group and arts education policy, is the Department still striving towards having local arts education partnerships? Has the creative schools initiative come from the manifesto of the local arts and education partnerships? We have had Cruinniú na nÓg and prior to it Cruinniú na Cásca. Both were wonderful. Will this national day of celebration for young people and children continue or will it be parked to one side and will we have Cruinniú na something else the year after?

On the promotion of the Irish language, the five-year action plan is welcome. The Department is involved in groundbreaking initiatives in arts education in engaging with the Depart-

ment of Education and Skills. The two Departments had not crossed over too much prior to the creative schools programme. Will the Minister speak to us about the engagement with the Department of Education and Skills in the delivery of gaelscoileanna throughout the country? Is it something in which she is actively involved or is it entirely within the remit of the Department of Education and Skills?

The Minister touched on Galway 2020, on which there was a presentation in the AV room last week. This will be a hugely exciting year in the country. The Galway International Arts Festival is of huge international significance for both the country and County Galway. As a regular visitor to the festival, I know that it needs a permanent contemporary visual arts space. From year to year it move from temporary building to temporary building. I visited the old post office on Shop Street, in which this year's contemporary arts practice exhibition was held. I know that there is a real desire to have a permanent home for this element of the festival. I hope it is something the Government will ensure is a legacy of Galway 2020 when Galway will be European capital of culture.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I will work backwards. If I leave anything out, the Deputy can refresh my memory. She asked a number of questions about various topics.

With reference to Galway 2020, as I mentioned in my opening statement, next year will be significant, and not just for Galway. The Minister of State, Deputy Kyne, has a particular interest in the issue. It will also be a significant year for Ireland in showcasing our culture and creativity and what we can do as a country. The eyes of not just Europe but the world will be on us. It is a great honour for Galway, along with Rijeka in Croatia. It is going to be really significant in terms of what we will be able to do. The legacy project was mentioned. When I was launching the cultural aspect, I went to visit a potential site that they are looking at, an old An Post building. Whether that transpires remains to be seen but it is certainly an option that is being looked at. There are a number of different options. One of our main goals for Galway 2020 is that we leave a legacy so that it is remembered for generations to come and the creativity and artistic endeavour that people put into the whole project are continued on so that it has ramifications for other people.

The Deputy also mentioned Creative Youth. We have expanded the programme, doubling it from 150 schools to 300 this year. That is going to engage about 100,000 students, which is quite significant. There is also an increased budget of over €6 million for this year, which is also combined with the Arts Council and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. There are three new local Creative Youth partnerships being rolled out through the education and training boards, ETBs, in Laois-Offaly, Kerry, and Limerick and Clare. These are to develop new networks and enable greater collaboration within the local cultural and creative communities and also to complement the work being done in the formal school setting. There is also Music Generation, which will increase opportunities for more children and young people to access high-quality, subsidised performance music education, with the commencement of five new local music education partnerships. As well as that there is the national creativity fund with 30 exciting new and innovative partnerships. That was launched in 2018. The projects are now up and running; 15 of them are for children and young people. They include the regional roll-out of the Fighting Words creative writing initiative and the founding of the Open Youth Orchestra of Ireland, a national youth ensemble for physically and intellectually challenged children. It is the first of its kind in Europe and is led by the Royal Irish Academy of Music. That was a very exciting thing to start. Continued buy-in from the Department of Education and Skills and the Arts Council and increased support in respect of the early years setting remain really important

for the continued success of the initiative.

The Deputy mentioned Cruinniú na nÓg, a national day for creativity for children. I think the specific question was whether it will continue. Yes, we want it to continue. The year before was Cruinniú na Cásca which in itself was a great celebration. I think Cruinniú na nÓg is even more successful and has great benefits for children and engaging them. We are the first country in the world to have a day dedicated just for children's creativity. It is quite cutting edge in that sense. The feedback, particularly from rural, local communities, has been really positive. It is a way of getting children involved in supporting local artists and voluntary arts groups as well. It is run through the culture and creativity teams at local authority level primarily. It took place on 15 June, as I said in my statement, and we had about 780 events. There are about 55,000 children who engage in it. It is really a great day. There are three new young ambassadors as part of Cruinniú 2019. There was also a full citizen engagement plan which we rolled out, including a partnership with RTÉ, and the programme showed increased attendance and increased diversity of events available for children and young people. That was positive as well.

The recognition of Gaelscoileanna is important to my Department and there have been problems in this regard. It is an issue really primarily for the Minister for Education and Skills. I understand that a number of new Gaelscoileanna were announced recently following an intervention from the Language Commissioner and I think that announcement was widely welcomed. However, it is mainly a matter for the Minister for Education and Skills.

Deputy Niamh Smyth: If I can ask one follow-up question, in terms of the local arts education partnerships, the Minister mentioned that three ETBs were successful under her Department in terms of the roll-out of arts education for secondary schools. I know Cavan-Monaghan ETB was not one of those. From personal experience, I know it is certainly doing massive work in the visual, performing and literary arts. Joanne Brennan is leading the local arts and education partnership there and has vast experience. They were bitterly disappointed that they were not included in getting that annual programme funding. I would ask the Minister to look at what they are doing. I personally think it is a model of excellence in terms of their delivery. I ask the Minister to engage with Joanne Brennan and see what they are doing there. There is a lot to be gained and information and good practice that could be shared throughout the ETBs. There are only 16 of them across the country and they are a really positive and useful vehicle for the delivery of arts education. Cavan-Monaghan was certainly leading the way in terms of the delivery of that and actually ran a pilot scheme as far back as 2015. I encourage the Minister to see what they are doing there and maybe give them some guidance, perhaps in the next tranche of funding she may be giving out to ETBs, that they would be successful because they are already doing it.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: We would be most happy to engage with them and see if we can pursue options with them because it does sound like a very positive development that they have out there. I have no difficulty doing that.

Deputy Niamh Smyth: I thank the Minister.

Senator Maura Hopkins: I thank the Minister for her presentation. She mentioned a number of items under the Creative Ireland programme. How has it developed during 2019? Are she and the Department satisfied that the benefits of the Creative Ireland programme are being felt and spread across the country? The Minister has answered my question about the creative schools initiative, which Deputy Smyth asked, with regard to the number of schools being brought under that scheme being doubled from 150 to 300 and an additional budget being

put in place. It is a really important initiative and partnership with the Department of Education and Skills. A number of months ago I was at an art installation funded through this programme in Roscommon County Council offices and it was wonderful to see children engaging in it. We could see the practical benefits in terms of that programme being rolled out.

On Galway 2020, my question has been answered really. It is going to be a major event for Galway and I am happy to hear that there is a focus on it being a national event as well. While the Minister of State, Deputy Kyne, is on the other side of the county, I am from the eastern side of Galway. It is important that we would see a number of events taking place within the wider Galway region and obviously as a national showcase. There is significant Government funding being provided for Galway 2020. I really want to emphasise the importance of it being spread across the area. I say that because I was recently at the launch of the Larry Reynolds festival, which was mentioned. Funding was secured through the summer festival scheme. There is such talent and interest. The committee is very vibrant and they do a massive amount with minor funding. There is merit in ensuring the Galway 2020 programme, in terms of its reach, spreads wider than just the city.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I thank the Deputy for her comments. She asked me if we are satisfied with how the Creative Ireland programme is going. I believe it going from strength to strength. It is working right across Government with the aim of embedding creativity across public policy ultimately and supporting and enabling participation in creative activities. The Senator and Deputy Brendan Smith mentioned the Creative Youth plan. Real gains have been made in the Creative Youth plan and in the creative communities plan because of buy-in from the Department of Education and Skills ultimately and also from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. That is enabling a change at policy level, which probably was not done previously, and it is working very well.

Under the Creative Youth plan, the schools in County Roscommon participating in the creative schools initiative include the Feevagh national school in Ballinasloe, Scoil Cill Rónáin in Keadue and Scoil na nAingeal Naofa in Boyle. It is great to see the number of participants in that initiative double. It may be an initiative that could be rolled out to more schools in the future. It is a positive measure. If we can engage with children at a young level in any type of creativity, it tends to stay with them for life, and that is something we are trying to do.

Did the Senator ask me a question about Cruinniú na nÓg?

Senator Maura Hopkins: No.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: Under the creative communities element of the programme, there were nearly 1,600 initiatives over the initial two years covering a range of genres, art, theatre, music, outreach training and capacity building, and that plan was a major success. There were a further 500 specific projects supporting this element, which was quite good. In Roscommon, a project funded through the creative communities plan included the annual children's book festival, which is called Ros na nÓg, which is run by Roscommon County Council library services. It is a national festival which celebrates literacy and creativity for children of all ages. October is a very busy month apparently in Roscommon library services because they have a myriad of events scheduled throughout their branch library network throughout the month.

The whole-of-Government Culture Ireland programme has a wide range of measures to create opportunities for people of all ages in all parts of the country to engage with creativity and to derive all of the personal and collective benefits that flow from that engagement. We have

expanded our particular programme this year and we hope to do so more in the future.

What was the Senator's last question about the Galway 2020 programme?

Senator Maura Hopkins: Yes, but it was more of a comment.

Chairman: I draw the attention of the Senator to a division that has been called in the Seanad.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: The Senator asked about the import of the Galway 2020 programme in terms of the rest of the country. Obviously, that is something we want to ensure happens. While Galway 2020 will be located in the county and city of Galway it is for Ireland and for everybody to engage in it. We hope public representatives like the Senator will support the events because lifting one boat lifts all of us ultimately, and that is what we want to do.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Tá roinnt ceisteanna agam. I will not raise questions that have already been covered but some questions I wish to raise have not been touched on. One concerns museum funding for both the National Museum of Ireland and the local museums. We had presentations from local museums before the committee earlier this year and they raised a number of issues. Some raised increasing insurance costs, a matter which is probably out of the Minister's hands. While insurance matters, as such, are a private matter for companies, in many cases these are small rural museums but there are also some in the city that have increased costs because sometimes they display priceless objects or artifacts that have a price tag which increases their insurance cover. Small museums find it difficult to cover insurance costs if they do not have a significant footfall and an independent benefactor to keep their doors open to provide the service they deliver. Has consideration been given in the culture budget to finding a mechanism to provide group insurance schemes for museums? If so, it could also address the needs in some of the other cultural institutions mentioned earlier.

The programme funding for the National Museum of Ireland was €13 million. That seems large but a number of acquisitions, for instance, would put a big dent in that pot. That is usually what the museum is seeking and it also has a big programme. I have had communications with the Minister and the museum on expanding its exhibition space and putting more of its archived artifacts on display. That funding, while it appears substantial is small in comparison, for instance, to the funding for the Arts Council, An Chomhairle Ealaíon, or even the funding available for the very worthwhile Galway 2020 programme, which is less than it but it is large considering it is a one-off programme. Is the funding for the national cultural institutions and, in particular, the National Museum of Ireland because it has the highest number of visitors, large enough or does the Minister believe it is hampering those institutions' abilities to respond to demand?

Another area I wish to raise does not come directly under the culture heading as such but it does come under in a way in that Screen Ireland comes under it, which I wish well. Funding in that area is increasing and, hopefully, it will deliver a more sustainable film industry into the future, which the committee has discussed here previously and which the Minister has discussed in the Dáil Chamber. We have permission from the EU with respect to tax reliefs for the industry up to 2020. Tax relief is tax foregone in some ways but we must attract a specific element of the film industry, multinationals or the big companies from abroad to make their big films in Ireland. We have had good news on that front in recent times, but we need to examine how we can build a sustainable film industry which has directly employed workers. If, in 2023 or 2024, the EU says such tax relief can no longer be granted, we must find a mechanism whereby

the State can fund that directly. Would that be through increased funding for Screen Ireland?

I have a question on the spend on the Decade of Centenaries since its inception and its fore-runners. I was a member of the all-party committee which advised the advisers or the Minister in that respect. The allocation of €1 million to celebrate the centenary events in 2019, is minuscule. Also, the allocation of €10,000 to local authorities in that respect is derisory. The local authorities are encouraged to put their own funding with that allocation. However, given the number of local historical groups and the great interest that was shown when the last round of funding was available in 2016, that funding allocation needs to be greatly increased to encourage local organisations to organise events beyond just those of local interest so that they can attract people from outside their locality to help make sense of, celebrate and commemorate what happened 100 years ago. The Minister attended a number of events organised by local organisations, such as the one in Soloheadbeg. Those events cost much more than would have been available if that €10,000, which would have been the full amount for that county, had been given to the organisations in question. Funding needs to substantially increase if we are to do justice to the events that shaped Ireland's history from 2019 onwards.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I thank the Deputy for his questions and comments. As for the National Museum of Ireland, we engage with all national cultural institutions to ensure they have adequate resources for their needs. Project Ireland 2040 includes €85 million for the National Museum of Ireland, which is quite significant and will be a key support. We have also provided support for county museums and key organisations such as the Hunt Museum, the Foynes Flying Boat and Maritime Museum in Limerick, Marsh's Library and the Butter Museum in Cork. The Heritage Council also runs the museum standards programme, which funds local museums to help them get up to standard. I recognise that it can be a difficult issue. We are also funding digitisation projects as well. In an ideal world we would have a bigger budget for any national cultural institution. However, this year I allocated a significant amount of money and we hope that the €85 million in Project Ireland 2040 will help realise a significant difference for the National Museum of Ireland in the future.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: The Project Ireland 2040 plan is over 20 years, is it not?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: It is over ten years. The title says 2040 but it the plan is for a ten-year period.

The 2019 work programme included many highlights, such as the exhibition on the First Dáil, which was opened by the Ceann Comhairle on 17 January. The National Museum of Ireland's strategic plan for 2019 to 2022 was launched in early March, and an exhibition by the Down-based artist Alison Lowry, which was an artistic response to the Tuam mother and baby home, the Magdalen laundries, and domestic violence, was also launched in March. As part of the Traveller's Journey exhibition, the Department of Education and Skills has collaborated with our colleagues in the folk life curatorial team to launch an installation entitled "Camp", which will include work created by students from Limerick School of Art and Design and communities of Travellers in the west of Ireland, and will be displayed in the Museum of Country Life. Other exhibitions include the Henri Cartier-Bresson exhibition and the rural electrification exhibition, which was launched on 11 July. It is a very exciting programme and other progress is happening in 2019 as well. The physical developments across the site over the next 15 years will be underpinned by three principles: protection, which includes providing the best conditions for the care of its collections, as well as access for education and research; safeguarding, that is, ensuring that all National Museum of Ireland sites are safe and secure as collections for the public; and accessibility, which means making the sites, exhibitions and

interpretations fully accessible for all our people.

The Deputy asked about the audiovisual action plan and Screen Ireland. We have a ten-year audiovisual action plan with funding of €200 million under Project Ireland 2040, which will support the development of the industry. I agree with the Deputy's sentiment about making Ireland somewhere special for the film industry. The section 481 film tax relief has been extended and there has been a regional uplift of 5%, which is important. I know from talking to film industry representatives from other jurisdictions that space is a big issue for them. That is an area in which the regional uplift will be transformative and will also have economic benefits for local people. There is huge demand for the facilities at Troy Studios in Limerick, for example, and we can do more in that regard. The action plan contained eight policy recommendations, including oversight of the industry by the steering group; the section 481 film tax relief; strategic review of feature film funding; skills development; regulatory reform; and marketing and other reforms. They are all important issues. The skills development programme through Screen Skills Ireland is a new initiative that was set up in response to some of the submissions the film industry has made in that regard. There will also be a skills assessment for the section 481 tax credit relief. We have ongoing engagement with all stakeholders about project finance, which ultimately aims to attract international audiovisual projects to Ireland. All those initiatives are in line with the Department's audiovisual action plan. There is much exciting work going on in the film industry, and we continue to keep in close contact with stakeholders in order that we can work collaboratively together for everyone's benefit.

The Deputy's last question related to centenaries. He and I have spoken in the Dáil about the decade of centenaries on a number of occasions. This year I allocated €1.1 million to support the programme, which is a funding increase of €250,000 on the 2018 allocation. That is a positive. I will seek to continue to appropriately resource the programme over the coming period through the normal budgetary process. We are reviewing the funding requirements in the context of the development of the commemorative programme in line with the advice from the expert advisory committee. I thank members for their efforts and participation in the all-party Oireachtas committee, which is of assistance in developing that programme.

We have given money to local authorities, as the Deputy mentioned. That is important, because local people want to commemorate events in their own areas and counties, apart from the full State ceremonial events. It was very important that we marked that and allocated money to the local authorities to do what they wanted to commemorate different events. We doubled the 2018 funding; therefore that €10,000 is double what it was previously. We also provided €10,000 to Soloheadbeg in Tipperary, where I attended an event myself. The focus in 2019 has mainly been on larger national events, such as the centenary of the First Dáil. Last year was also a significant year for women's suffrage and the first woman being elected. I announced the Markievicz bursaries through my Department in recognition of that, and there was also a pop-up museum. However, I note the Deputy's comments.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Ní choinneoidh mé an tAire i bhfad. I refer first to the issue of the capital spend. There was an allocation of €40.107 million and the profile to 30 June was less than half of that, for some reason. I can never understand why we can never get people to do anything in the first half of the year; they certainly do not send bills in. The profile was €17.015 million but the spend was only €11.296 million. While the profile was for some inexplicable reason less than 50% of the allocation, only 66% of that profile was spent. It is also stated that the total allocation for cultural infrastructure and development for the year was €12.15 million. The profile outlined that €4 million was to be spent but only €1 million has been spent. How much

had been spent as of 30 September? We are getting into the endgame because all bills should be submitted by the end of November in order to give the usual 30 days to check receipts and so on. Can the Minister explain the shortfall in spending?

Baineann an dara ceist atá agam le Gaillimh 2020 Príomhchathair Chultúir na hEorpa. An bhfuil an Roinn sásta leis an méid tábhacht atá á thabhairt ag Gaillimh 2020 don acmhainn cultúrtha is luachmhaire san iarthar, is é sin an teanga? Déantar go leor rudaí in áiteanna eile ar dhomhan, ach níl ach tír amháin ina bhfuil an Ghaeilge á labhairt. Is teanga ársa, thar a bheith tábhachtach, agus thar a bheith luachmhar i gcomhthéacs na hEorpa agus an domhain í. Is beag teanga go bhfuil stair scríofa chomh fada aici leis an nGaeilge. Ó tharla go bhfuil riar maith maoinithe ag teacht ó Roinn na hAirí, an bhfuil siad sásta leis an mbéim atá á chur ag Gaillimh 2020 ar an nGaeilge, ar saíocht na Gaeilge, agus ar gach rud a bhaineann leis an nGaeilge? Baineann an ceol, na hamhráin agus an fhilíocht leis an nGaeilge.

People often refer to John Millington Synge, W.B. Yeats and the Irish revival poets but without the Irish language, they were nothing. All their inspiration came from the Irish language, Irish mythology and so on. I am not sure whether I am a big fan of John Millington Synge. He used literal translation into English. One could do the same thing from English to Irish by translating word for word, putting the words in the wrong order and getting bizarre grammar. In spite of that, he is one of our most famous playwrights. Much of his work was inspired by Inis Meáin, one of the Aran Islands, where he stayed in what is now known as Teach Synge. Is the Minister happy that there is enough emphasis in the Galway 2020 programme on the Gaeltacht, the Irish language and our unique linguistic heritage? The Irish language is a particularly valuable cultural asset because it has such a long written history. In fact, it has the longest written history of any extant vernacular language this side of the Alps. As the Department is one of the big funders of Gaillimh 2020, is the Minister happy with the emphasis on the Irish language in its programme?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: On the latter point, there is an Irish language officer, tá an teanga an-tábhachtach for Galway 2020 and there is a significant amount of programming that involves the Irish language. I do not know whether the Deputy attended the launch of the cultural programme.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I was on a cultural visit to America at the time.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: It is being run in partnership with TG4, which is to be welcomed, and there was an event to celebrate that. Synge was closely associated with the Aran Islands and I understand the Deputy's reference in that regard. There are Irish programmes and I am satisfied that it will be representative. I agree with the Deputy that it is our national language and must be represented through Galway 2020. I am sure an Aire Stáit, Teachta Kyne, will ensure that it is.

On capital funding, we are very confident that we will draw down the full funding amount. On 30 September, we had spent €4.1 million in capital funding under subhead A7. We are one of the very few Departments to always spend almost the entire allocation. A total of 99.6% of the allocation was spent one year, while approximately 99% was spent in 2017-18. We always spend every cent we get. In this Department, a small amount goes a long way. I referred to the €76,000 allocated to the Crawford art gallery. It is a small amount of money in the context of the overall departmental spend, but it had significant effect as it allowed the gallery to open on Sundays all year round, which it could not do heretofore. We are satisfied that we will spend every cent we have.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: On a supplementary matter, to what specific projects was the €12 million allocated?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: It goes to cultural institutions and local capital access. I do not have a breakdown of the allocation with me, but I can ensure it is provided to the Deputy.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: It is a constant mystery that State agencies and county councils-----

Deputy Josepha Madigan: There is no mystery in this Department. Every cent is accounted for.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I had not finished my sentence. I did not refer to the Department. State agencies and county councils seem to wait until November to submitting the bills, which makes it much more difficult for the Department to manage its budget.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: It can be difficult to predict with capital projects, as the Deputy can appreciate-----

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: If they were forced to submit them, at a minimum, quarterly, it would be far easier to predict possible underspends, correct and reallocate. It is far more difficult when one is playing a guessing game and ringing up trying to find out what they are doing. One would expect that the money is spent continuously, particularly in respect of multi-annual projects. This is a problem with local authorities. It is not a new problem or one that any Minister has managed to crack, but we must keep trying to resolve it because it is a most unsatisfactory way for the authorities to do their business. The bills should be submitted on a quarterly basis. In other Departments, the failure to do so has led to shortfalls. It creates far more work for the Department in trying to track what is happening on the ground.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I acknowledge that.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Four members who are present are also members of the Joint Committee on Rural and Community Development, a meeting of which started at 2.30 p.m. We will have to try to engage in bilocation for the next hour.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: We could make a hole in the wall.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I apologise if we are running in and out.

Chairman: Níl fadhb ar bith agam leis sin. Tuigim gurb é sin an cás.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: May I ask one more question on heritage?

Chairman: No. Is féidir le Teachta Ó Cuív teacht ar ais tar éis Teachta Michael Collins agus Teachta Danny Healy-Rae. Bhí orthu fanacht, so is féidir leis fanacht freisin.

In 2017 the Taoiseach committed to double arts funding within seven years. Two budgets later, current spending on culture and arts has increased by 13.8%. Obviously, the increase is welcome. Is it still Government policy to double arts funding or was that a claim made in the context of the Fine Gael leadership contest? Is it possible to achieve a 100% increase within seven years? Does the Minister intend to make good on that commitment?

I wish to support the point made by Deputy Ó Snodaigh but do not require the Minister to respond. I ask that she take my point into account. Although the funding provided for com-

memorations last year is welcome, it is nowhere near what was provided in 2016. The 2016 programme was very successful and many communities availed of it. It increased the capacity for commemorations as many organisations are in a strong position to plan programmes once they are given adequate notice. The programme under the local authorities was a great success but this year, 2020 and 2021 are crucial and sufficient funding will be required.

Creative Ireland is a multi-departmental and multi-agency strategy. Is the Minister satisfied that she is receiving adequate co-operation and buy-in from the agencies involved? How much of the money being spent on Creative Ireland is going towards design?

My final question relates to an area that is in the programme allocation breakdown. I want to understand how this came about. According to media commentary and Government statements, responsibility for funding provided for the Cork event centre has transferred to the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. This has been an ongoing issue for several years. It has been a torturous process and there is considerable frustration about it in Cork. Some of this frustration has been caused by the lack of clarity and transparency. The Government is saying there is a clear funding commitment. The public, Opposition Deputies and councillors do not know what the commitment is and are no clearer about the timeline. What is the timeline and what is the role of the Department of Culture, Heritage and Gaeltacht if the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government is now the lead Department? Why did the lead role change? When will everything that has been agreed, not all of which is necessarily in the public domain, be known? Is the project fully in compliance with the legal restrictions that the Department was trying to overcome?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: The Chairman mentioned the increase in expenditure by my Department and asked whether I was hopeful that funding would double. He is correct that the Taoiseach made a commitment to double the funding in the seven years to 2025. Obviously, I believe he will honour that. I am in budget negotiations for this year. I am using my best endeavours in the context of a Brexit budget to get whatever I can for my Department. We will publish those details on 8 October so I am not in a position to comment in detail on any budgetary allocations pending that announcement. The background to making resources available for 2020 is a difficult one, as the Minister for Finance has outlined. I will continue to place emphasis on the core functions and services of the Department to maintain the momentum created across the arts and culture sphere by initiatives funded by my Department, which are consistent with the Taoiseach's commitment to double funding by 2025. In addition, I will emphasise the importance of conserving and managing our heritage as a support. We can talk about heritage later on along with the other areas in my Department. I am using my best endeavours to ensure that whatever I achieve for the Department will be in line with the Taoiseach's commitment to funding. That is all I can say at the moment.

I will speak in a moment about the Cork event centre. If I omit any issue, the Chairman should remind me of it. The Chairman mentioned the War of Independence commemorations. A number of different events will be held this year. There will be events marking the anniversary of the death of Terence MacSwiney; the execution of Kevin Barry; the burning of Cork; the passing of the Government of Ireland Act, which provided for the formal partition of our country; and Bloody Sunday, which will be commemorated with the GAA. There will also be an increased role for the local authorities. The reason I mentioned those events is that when one compares the War of Independence commemorations with the 1916 commemorations, there were a significant number of State-led ceremonial events in 2016 and there will not be as many State-led events this year. Funding is extremely important and is part of my budgetary negotia-

tions. We want to ensure that people have the resources to commemorate the events I outlined and other events in line with the expert advisory group. Since 2016, there have not been as many significant State-led events. That must be borne in mind when we are talking about resources. Nevertheless, some of the commemorations I have outlined will need to be resourced. Again, local authorities need to have money at their disposal to commemorate certain events.

The development of the Cork event centre is very much in line with what the Government wants to achieve with regard to balanced regional development and sustainable urban development under Project Ireland 2040. It is a project led by Cork City Council, which has selected a development company to progress the project. This company has engaged an international events company - Live Nation - as the preferred operator. The Taoiseach recently indicated that a new simplified process is being put in place to ensure certainty regarding the levels of funding and the delivery mechanisms for the centre, which will provide a substantial addition to the cultural offering in Cork city and county when it is complete. Under new arrangements, the project is being transferred to the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and discussions in that regard are under way. We have not finalised this but high-level discussions are under way. We are all very eager for the project to progress. The Government is committed to investing in the Cork event centre, which would be of great significance to Cork and the country. It is a 6,000-seat event centre that will offer a significant amount in terms of the arts in Cork. As this has been such a complex issue, we are of the view that the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government is best placed to deal with infrastructure of that size. Since I became a Minister, we have had major discussions regarding the Cork event centre and I believe the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government will be able to deliver it soon as possible. I hope that is of assistance to the Chairman.

Chairman: It is helpful to an extent but the upshot is that meetings are ongoing and we have been hearing that for some time. I may have misinterpreted what the Minister said but my understanding is that responsibility has not yet transferred to the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: Not yet. I imagine it will be transferred over the next couple of weeks.

Chairman: Will there be a public statement about that?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: That will be up to the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. The difficulty with making public statements is that it is never advisable to do so when an issue falls between two stools. Considerable progress has been made to get the project to this point in recent months. Mr. Martin Fraser is the main driver behind this and has been of great assistance in liaising between the two Departments to ensure that we deliver this event centre. I believe it will be done by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, which is positive because my Department probably does not have the level of expertise required to deliver on a project like this. In light of the various issues that have arisen in recent years, with which the Chairman is familiar, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government is best placed to oversee the project.

Chairman: What is the position regarding the simplified funding procedure?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: Again, I am sure the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government will enlighten everybody on that. As the Chairman can appreciate, it would be premature for me to talk about it because it is not a moveable feast in terms of transferring

responsibility to the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. It must discuss it internally and I will certainly not speak on its behalf.

Chairman: I appreciate that but-----

Deputy Josepha Madigan: That is all I can say about it at the moment.

Chairman: One of the key funding issues was the dispute between the local authority and the Government about whether the additional money requested would be provided as a loan or a grant.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I do not propose to comment on any of those issues.

Chairman: Can the Minister confirm whether that was the case?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I will neither confirm nor deny. As we know, it is a project led by Cork City Council. The Chairman is aware of that. I do not to jeopardise this event centre in any way and I am sure the Chairman does not wish to do so either. I do not want to prejudice matters by talking about the financial aspects of the project.

Chairman: Before moving on, I will just say that this matter does not just concern the event centre because if it is a loan as opposed to a grant, that will have implications for the other services that Cork City Council provides, for example, housing and roads.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I have no doubt Cork City Council is well aware of all the issues that pertain to the project.

Chairman: Perhaps it is, but the people of Cork are not aware of them and there are implications for them depending on whether a grant or loan is provided. In any event, I appreciate the Minister's response. We will now move to programme B, heritage. I invite the Minister to make her statement on the programme.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: Total funding of more than €54 million has been made available for my Department's heritage programme area in 2019. This includes €38.7 million allocated for current expenditure and €15.4 million for capital expenditure. Total gross heritage programme expenditure up to the period ending 30 June 2019 was just under €10 million. This figure had increased to just over €13 million, as at 31 August 2019. The rate of expenditure is slower than anticipated due to a number of timing issues which it is expected will be resolved before the year end.

Ireland's first national biodiversity conference took place at Dublin Castle in February of this year, and attracted more than 500 delegates and 4,500 live streamers. Jointly organised by my Department and the Irish Forum on Natural Capital, the event brought together all key stakeholders from Government, public bodies, business and non-governmental organisations, NGOs, to identify measures to help reverse biodiversity loss and implement the National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017 to 2021. The momentum generated by the conference was sustained by the publication of the interactive report from the conference by the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department on 22 May last, which was International Day for Biological Diversity. The report details the conference charter, Seeds for Nature, which includes a suite of commitments from 14 Departments, State agencies, businesses and NGOs that go above and beyond current work programmes to take action for nature and support the implementation of the National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017 to 2021.

The work of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department continued apace in 2019, with responsibility for the ongoing management of some 87,000 ha across our national parks and nature reserve network. Annually, these parks and reserves attract 4 million visitors and support a broad range of enterprise and employment opportunities for the communities in which they are located. A new twinning arrangement has been established between the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Parks Canada to connect Connemara National Park and the Marconi Station in Ireland, respectively, with Terra Nova National Park and Signal Hill national historical site in Newfoundland and Labrador. The twinning arrangement will promote bilateral co-operation and exchanges for the mutual benefit of these national parks and historical sites, which have an important role in habitat protection and the conservation of iconic species, as well as in cultural heritage of both countries. Connemara National Park is set for major development in the coming years, largely due to significant funding from Fáilte Ireland and the twinning arrangement. This park has seen an increase in visitor numbers this year of nearly 5% from last year and the visitor centre is to remain open all year around for the first time ever this year in response to its increased popularity. His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales, again enjoyed the magnificence of our national parks this year when he visited Wicklow Mountains National Park in May. Wicklow Mountains National Park is Ireland's largest national park, covering more than 22,000 ha of the Wicklow uplands, comprising mainly bog and heath with smaller areas of native woodland and mountain streams.

Our historical buildings and structures remain a vital part of our unique heritage. While the primary responsibility to care for and maintain our built heritage structures rests with the owner, the built heritage investment scheme and the structures at risk fund funded by my Department and administered by local authorities, invest essential capital in our built heritage. A total of 478 heritage projects across every county will benefit from a combined €4.3 million under this year's historic structures fund, HSF, and built heritage investment scheme, BHIS. The funding will support the owners and custodians of historical and protected structures as they carry out hundreds of small-scale, labour-intensive projects to repair and conserve our historical built environment. These projects provide vital support for local jobs in conservation, traditional skills and construction.

The Heritage Council is once again working in partnership with the Department to administer the historic towns initiative in 2019. Six historic towns will share in €1 million in capital funding in 2019, supporting programmes of heritage-led regeneration and bringing economic benefits to help historic towns to prosper through increased visitor numbers and decreased numbers of vacant buildings and commercial premises. All of these initiatives will work towards ensuring that historical buildings remain alive and in use so that they are ultimately handed on to future generations in better condition than we found them. I am happy to expand on any issues members wish to raise in respect of this programme area before my colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Seán Kyne, speaks about the relevant aspects of the Gaeltacht, Irish language and islands programme area.

Chairman: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire.

Deputy Michael Collins: I refer to a matter I raised earlier with the Minister concerning the hedge-cutting Bill, which comes under the heritage area of her Department. I presume most members are aware that we had lengthy discussions on the Bill in the committee and in the Dáil and Seanad. In the absence of the Chairman, I chaired a committee meeting during which we voted in a democratic process. Members had different views and everyone had an opportunity to speak. The democratic vote of the committee was carried forward to the Seanad and then

passed in the Dáil. In the small print somewhere, the Minister evidently had the overriding responsibility to sign off on the decision. In fairness, it was the biggest slap in the face to democracy that could be given. In rural areas in particular the verges and hedges on the roadside need to be cut. We were not talking about hen farming. Families are driving along roads. Farmers and others are trying to cut overgrown areas on roads and crossroads with strimmers and hedge clippers. I do not want to insult anybody but my assumption is that the Minister lives in an area where there is a lot of tar and concrete and few, if any, verges. I live in a totally different area. The process we went through was democratic, yet the Minister waited for a week into the summer break before changing a democratic decision with the stroke of a pen. She kicked democracy out the window. That was utterly irresponsible as far as I am concerned. It put many lives at risk. One has to live in a rural area to understand. I do not believe in chopping and cutting in a ridiculous way. I am talking about simple hedge-cutting. We voted for it in the committee. That was democracy at work. Surely to God, out of respect for the committee, the Minister could have come back here a week before the summer recess and put her ideas before the committee and allowed some bit of democracy to work. Perhaps she will elaborate on why she did not do so. As far as I am concerned, she threw the whole Bill in the bin. Verge cutting that was meant to take place on 1 August, which had been agreed here, has been put back to September, the same situation as we had previously. That is putting lives at risk and causing damage to vehicles. Perhaps the Minister will elaborate on why she made that decision.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I have no difficulty answering but perhaps Deputy Danny Healy-Rae wants to ask the same question.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: Yes, I do.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I will answer both together.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: It would make sense for the Minister to deal with the same question once rather than twice.

Chairman: Yes, that is fine.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: It saves the committee wasting time.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: What I have to say is very straightforward. What the Minister did to people in rural Ireland is totally unjustified. One has to be there to understand it. Hedges in the city and along the motorways are being cut every day of the week, even when there is no need to cut them. One could land in Killarney or Mitchelstown and think one has travelled the country, but that is not the truth when one goes up little roads in Gneevgullia and back around Kilcummin and Lauragh. Where there is no trace of the yellow line, it is because the hedge has grown out over it. All we asked was that roadside hedges be cut. I tabled an amendment which specified that they be cut all year round. I have no gripe with the presence of birds, bees or anything like that, but they have the whole country in which to live. We must put people first when it comes to maintaining roadsides. We are telling people to walk and cycle, but they cannot do so because of overhanging hedges at that time of year. I dropped my amendment which sought to have hedges cut all year round because it had come back to me that the Minister was in favour of cutting them in August. I said to myself that that was a start, but, lo and behold, when we back went down to County Kerry the announcement came that she had forbidden the cutting of hedges in August. That was greatly hurtful to people in rural Ireland. Narrow roads, indeed all roads, are affected by lack of sight around turns. Having the ability to see further around turns helps people's safety. We want to know what will happen next year. We brought the issue to

the floor of the Dáil at the behest of local authority members who had been inundated with requests from people who were seeking permission to cut hedges. They were making the request because there was extensive growth at that time of year. The rate of growth this year was worse than in any previous year. Local authority figures were raising the issue for years, asking where was the promised Bill and what was happening with it. I was here three years before we passed it, but here we are again, having achieved nothing after all of the debating and talking in council chambers, the Dáil Chamber and at this committee.

The Minister has let us down very badly. She has especially let down the people of rural Ireland. They have also been hurt by the hare licence issue and we are not going to take it lying down. If she thinks that will be the case, she is mistaken. Stopping us from cutting hedges in August is the worst thing that has happened to rural Ireland. The Minister promised us that she would allow it and we voted in favour of it here. Farming organisations all around the country were watching us, but here we are, having done nothing. In addition, we were stopped from burning in the month of March because it was stated there was no need to do it. What I have noticed since I came to Dublin is-----

Chairman: I ask the Deputy to, please, allow the Minister to answer his question.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I have my coat off here every day while it is pouring rain all of the time at home. It rains 40 times more in County Kerry than here. The Minister might not understand it, but there is a difference in weather conditions in County Kerry. We need to burn in the month of March, as well cutting hedges in August.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I am aware of the Deputies' concerns about the regulations. I did not navigate the Heritage Bill 2018 through various committees and the Dáil and all other Stages just to bring forward regulations that would be discretionary and not use them, if it was possible to do so. There was a two-year pilot scheme. Times were different from when we passed the Heritage Bill 2018 and I could see if we could make the regulations. I felt strongly that I was not in a position to do so. I will outline the main reasons I could not make them. To be clear, they will not be in force next year either because it is a two-year pilot scheme. I state that for the Deputy now, rather than mislead him and have him come back to me, or whoever will be in this position, next year.

The first reason was the national biodiversity conference which I hosted, in conjunction with the Irish Forum on Natural Capital, in February this year. It served to highlight threats to biodiversity. The second reason was the seeds for nature initiative which arose from the national biodiversity conference. It comprised a suite of commitments to nature and biodiversity which went beyond the respective organisations' work programmes to support, upscale and fast-track implementation of the national biodiversity action plan.

As we all know, we are living in a very different climate, if I can be excused for using the pun, from what we were living in. I refer to what has come to our attention regarding the climate.

Also of great significance in my decision-making was the summary of the report on the assessment of the intergovernmental panel on biodiversity and ecosystems by the Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. It published its global assessment of the state of the world's biodiversity and ecosystems in March this year. It was a stark assessment of the situation. The report showed that, globally, nature was suffering an unprecedented rate of decline and that the rate of species' extinction was accelerating, as was

the extinction of ecosystems. It indicated, however, that it was not too late to make a difference. There is a need to start without delay and with a commitment at local and global levels. The report also contained a reference to hedgerows. That was damning information that came to hand and I did not have it when the regulations were made.

I also considered Ireland's sixth national report to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. The report was published in May and showed our rate of progress in achieving our targets. In summary, partially effective progress was reported in achieving many of the national global targets but at an insufficient rate. Some of the findings made in the report specifically dealt with hedgerows. It stated the decline in "bees, butterflies and other insects has largely resulted from the effect of monoculture and the drive to ever-higher levels of productivity, characterised also by a loss or neglect of hedgerows, farmland edges and scrub". It went on to state "biodiversity in this wider landscape has been impacted in recent decades by trends to land use intensification and a loss of mixed land uses. This has led to the deliberate removal of habitats, for example, hedgerows and wetlands". It also criticised some agricultural policy which did not support diverse hedgerows.

The climate action plan 2019 was also something I took into account. As the Deputy is aware, it was published in June and included wide-ranging measures. I will not read the entire reference to hedgerows, but there is mention of the total area of hedgerows and non-forest woodland patches. It also refers to improving hedgerow management and encouraging the planting of new hedgerows.

I would like both Deputies to note that the decisions I made were welcomed by the Association of Farm and Forestry Contractors in Ireland, FCI. It was documented on the *agriland.ie* website which carried a piece stating it was very much welcomed-----

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Who was that?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: The agricultural contractors. They issued a press release to welcome that it was still possible to cut hedges for road safety reasons. The Deputies know some of the reasons for the cutting of hedges along roads, lanes and boreens better than I do, as they represent rural areas. One is overgrown hedges and fallen trees narrowing the carriageway, forcing traffic into oncoming traffic flow. It is still possible to cut hedges in that instance. It is also the case with briars and overhanging branches in forcing pedestrians and cyclists from road margins. It is permissible in such circumstances to cut hedges, as it is in the case of overgrown hedges blocking or impeding egress from farm holdings or fields, hedges concealing entrances or road safety and directional signage. It is also legal to cut hedges where they are concealing culverts or sharp bends. On balance, despite the fact I did not extend the regulations and will not be in a position to do so next year, hedges can be cut for road safety reasons. Section 8 of the Heritage Act 2018 and section 70 of the Roads Act 1993 were aligned in respect of the cutting of vegetation. The latter section states: "The owner or occupier of land shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that a tree, shrub, hedge or other vegetation on the land is not a hazard or potential hazard to persons using a public road and that it does not obstruct or interfere with the safe use of a public road or the maintenance of a public road." Even during the closed hedge-cutting period, therefore, a landowner can cut hedges where there is a road safety issue, as I outlined. I could say a bit more but that might be sufficient.

Chairman: After the following supplementary questions we will finish on this issue. There are answers and disagreements and it is not always possible to be satisfied where there are contrary views.

Deputy Michael Collins: On whether democracy is working, the legislation came through the committee and was voted on. From what the Minister stated, it appears she attended a biodiversity conference and an interagency discussion and that, all of a sudden, circumstances changed. I do not believe that the Minister was in office at the beginning of the process, although that is no fault of her own.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: The previous Minister with responsibility for heritage issues, Deputy Humphreys, initiated the process.

Deputy Michael Collins: Yes, she attended a number of committee meetings and everyone had a fair opportunity to contribute. It is currently a complete hames, given that roads in west County Cork are a desperate danger, although every Deputy will speak about his or her own area.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: One can still cut hedges.

Deputy Michael Collins: If one needs hedges on a road to be cut, the farmer or landowner will not allow it because he or she will be afraid of breaking the law. He or she will not allow anyone to touch the hedges. The danger is there will be blood on people's hands because of what the Minister did. That is the honest truth and I see it myself.

Chairman: That is strong language.

Deputy Michael Collins: Yes, it is.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: People will die in road accidents because they cannot see around corners.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I apologise for interrupting but I thought I had made the matter clear. Hedges can still be cut for road safety reasons.

Chairman: I will return to the Deputy but I ask that he refrain from such language.

Deputy Michael Collins: I apologise. The Minister indicated that hedge cutting has been thrown out the window. She made a decision that will return us to the same situation in future. Will people be able to cut verges next August? It is a "Yes" or "No" question.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: Nothing in the legislation prevents road safety related hedge cutting at any time of the year.

Deputy Michael Collins: I remind the Minister of the way the legislation passed through the Houses. This is democracy at its best but she smashed democracy-----

Deputy Josepha Madigan: The regulations were discretionary-----

Deputy Michael Collins: The legislation passed through the committee, the Seanad and the Dáil. Somewhere in the small print, however, after the Minister attended a biodiversity conference and a couple of other meetings, she decided that democracy would be thrown out the window. She decided to wait until the House began its recess, one week after Members went on their holidays, and to blow democracy out the window. It has caused considerable danger in rural communities.

Chairman: I will take questions from the other members before allowing the Minister to respond to all of them together.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I will allow Deputy Michael Collins to finish.

Deputy Michael Collins: Democracy was at work and everybody had their say. The Minister should have returned to the committee to discuss it. She should have shown some respect to those who were democratically elected by the people but she did not. She overruled them. She does not understand that while she lives in a land where there is tar, chip and plenty of concrete, we live in a rural environment and see the danger every day. Given that mothers try to cut hedges to get their car onto the road safely and be able to see left and right, something is seriously wrong. A grave injustice has been done to the people of rural Ireland. I do not refer to people butchering fields but rather about cutting roadside verges. It is a simple action that could have been taken on 1 August. The significant growth causes grave concern to the people of my constituency, who have been let down terribly by the Minister. Democracy in this country was kicked out the window.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: In July, Johnny Healy-Rae, Maura Healy-Rae and I secured a commitment that the council would start cutting the dangerous places at the start of August. The very minute the Minister issued her orders, the process stopped completely. No council executive will put his or her job on the line or break the law for me or any other politician. That is what is happening, as it has done over the years. Councils will not even write letters to landowners until 1 September and will not even cut the hedges on junctions this year. Anyone who cut hedges of his or her own accord was reported and enforcement officers were sent to stop them doing so. We had hoped that because the law was in place from 1 August, we would be allowed to cut them from that date but the Minister prevented us from doing so. I understand she is a Dublin Deputy but at the time, I called for her to be fired. That is how strongly I feel. I represent the people who have contacted me day in and day out. I recognise the calls from the local authority members asking us to do something in order that the roadside hedges could be cut.

While it is true the legislation provides that dangerous places can be cut, one has to go through such a rigmarole and an accident has to happen before it will be cut. That is what has happened for years and it is why the legislation was under debate in the previous Dáil as it is in the current one. Finally, even though the change was scheduled for August, the Minister deprived us of it with one stroke of a pen. Now she has suggested they will be not cut next August. If that is her attitude, I hope she is not Minister next July. She is wronging the people of rural Ireland. She indicated there is less scrub on farmland but what she does not realise about farmland is that people were fined and payments were cut because of scrub. Some bureaucrat said the scrub must be cut and that payments will be lost if it is not. Now the Minister has stated it is because people want to leave the scrub on the roadside. She has no meas for the people but she has it for biodiversity and insects, including bees. My priority is the people. I have nothing against bees, birds or anything else but there is plenty of room for them in ditches. I do not care what happens in the single line of a ditch or how many hedges there are. I planted a hedge on my farm, and when I removed a ditch and realised that it was the wrong step to take, I put it back immediately. The roadside, however, is different and we must keep it clear for the safety of the people.

Too many people are dying. If they tipped home, they would not be allowed to have one drink because the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Ross, was voted for, along with his lunacy of a Bill. The Minister, Deputy Ross, stated the Bill's purpose was to save lives. He did not save one with that racket, however. He caused people to tip home on ice and so on but now the Minister, Deputy Madigan, wants to hurt the people further by not allowing them

to travel on the roads. She wants to keep them off the roads altogether and says they must walk and get out of their cars. They cannot even walk on the roads, however, because their eyes would be picked up by briars. What is going on is terrible, as is what the Government is doing to rural Ireland. The more quickly the Government is blown out, the better. Every day I see one thing after another. To stop the cutting of hedges, after we in the House had voted against such action, is criminal. It is time for the Government to go and it should be gone. The people are waiting for it around the corner and it deserves what it will get.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: There are many reasons for the lack of biodiversity. The Minister mentioned some of them, including monoculture. In the past 40 or 50 years, we have turned from the type of farming that included some tillage and sowing of gardens. Not one farm in the country did not produce its own vegetables and potatoes. On all farms land was tilled and they all had cattle. There is no doubt that monoculture has done a lot of damage.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae is right in that there is much more rough growth than there was, especially on farms in the west, as the Minister of State, Deputy Kyne, will be aware. Sally and hazel grow on farms. If someone has a farm of 10 ha which is quite sizable in some parts of south Connemara, the irony is that if he or she as much as overclaims on 0.3 ha, he or she will lose three times that acreage in the single farm payment. The penalty is on three times the size of the land if it is more than a figure of 3%.

Some of us are really concerned about the bees and the birds, particularly in the countryside. Farmers are the protectors of the countryside and deeply concerned about nature. I have not met many farmers who do not deeply care about it. Farming grants and systems and market forces have forced them out of the type of farming in which they have traditionally engaged which was totally friendly towards all of the concerns expressed.

There was a meeting in our constituency which the Minister of State could not make because he was in Dublin. It was attended by 203 people and about roads. A constant complaint made at the meeting was about hedgecutting. There was a recent report that indicated that seven of the worst accident black spots on national roads were on the N59 between Clifden and Leenaun. I was talking to a local in Kylemore about the worst of all roads in the country and asked where exactly it was, trying to pinpoint the actual spot. He told me and said that if the hedges were cut, it might ameliorate the problem.

I would like to bring to the attention of the Minister a problem in County Kerry, where I had a bad accident, as well as in counties Cork, Galway and so on. When the summer comes and tourists arrive, they tend to drive closer to the middle of the road than we tend to do because we know of the dangers. A significant peril is cars coming towards you, close to the middle of the road, because the drivers are trying to see around the corner and take a chance in moving out to the centre of the road, whereas we know that one's best chance is to stay in. The big risk is hitting a pedestrian, but it is the lesser of two evils because at least one can pull out, but if there is a car in the middle of the road, one cannot pull in.

I want to be calm in what I am saying. As far as I am concerned, what happened amounted to bad faith on the part of the Government. I am not saying on the part of the Minister personally but the Government as a collective. Under the Constitution, the Government is a collective, not a group of individuals. I say it was bad faith on the part of the Government because the original proposal brought to the Seanad by the then Minister, Deputy Humphreys, on behalf of the Government led by Deputy Enda Kenny was, as the officials present will be able to confirm, to allow hedgecutting on eight grounds in the month of August. Fianna Fáil was not happy

with the proposal in the Seanad and I drafted an amendment for Fianna Fáil Senators that stated seven of them were unnecessary. They were undesirable ecologically, but we should retain the ability to cut the outside hedge because road safety issues are involved. I will come to why the Minister's solution will not work in practice.

If one checks the Official Report of the debate in the Seanad, one will see that the Government voted against the amendment but that all other parties voted for it. The Bill passed through the Seanad with the Fianna Fáil amendment. It covered a square field and if it was of a different shape, one might take off even more. It was also passed by the Dáil. We conducted the operation in good faith and our understanding was that the Government wanted to allow cutting on eight sides but that we had stopped it from doing so, changing the number of grounds to one, on which there was consensus in the Dáil where I do not think the Government opposed it. I think there was a reasonable expectation that the regulations would be implemented. The biodiversity groups which were not happy about it from the beginning then managed to persuade the Minister to ignore the clear understanding and consensus reached in the Oireachtas. The Bill having been passed, everyone understood the Minister would bring forward regulations, but now she has undermined it again, which amounts to very sharp practice by the Government. Those who had been in government and knew the history should have pointed this out because the Minister might not have been aware of it. Unlike us, she had not sat through it all.

What is the difference in what the Minister has told us people can do? I read it as meaning I can cut any hedge I want to in Cornamona where the roads are very narrow and there are many corners. I defy anybody to win a court case against me. Certainly, in summer time if one cuts the outside of a hedge on the breen up to my house, nobody will interfere because there is no part of it that does not have a bend.

Chairman: I ask the Deputy to be concise.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I am trying to be, but I am also trying to be clear about what exactly I am saying. The real problem is that there are well funded and powerful ecological groups. It is similar to the problem encountered with hillwalking, where a hillwalker would not win a court case after breaking his or her neck have fallen on a slippery rock that had been there since Adam and Eve. However, the landowner might have to defend a case that he or she would inevitably win but which would take up a year or two of his or her life, not to mention the worry, the concern, the need to pay barristers and so on. Similarly, in this case I foresee that if people start to cut hedges under the qualified exemptions for which the Minister has provided - a person would have to prove in each individual case that it was justified - many farmers will be afraid of litigation and say that while a road is dangerous, they will not take the risk and cut the hedge.

Since many farmers with small landholdings do not have agricultural machinery, hedgecutting is done by the county council. Galway County Council is strong on this issue, as the Minister of State can explain to the Minister. Whatever chance an individual might have of getting away with cutting a hedge and not having a voluntary group taking him or her to court, the reality is that councils will not take the chance when commissioning cutting. If Galway County Council was to use all of the regulations the Minister has given us with the exemptions and decide to start cutting hedges on all of the twisty roads that are dangerous - there are few straight roads where we live - it would quickly receive a writ. The theory of that is fine. The practice is non-applicable and, therefore, it does not hold up.

Can I also say-----

Chairman: Will the Deputy finish on that, please?

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I will, with two sentences. In relation to burning, those of us who live in rural areas have tried to explain this time and again. Most accidental burning of mountains happens in April, May and June during the dry weather. When one does not have controlled burning or control of overgrown vegetation, it becomes woody and then it is like a tinderbox when one gets into April, May and June. One will not burn vegetation in February. It is hard enough to do it in March. By not agreeing to the extension that was agreed in good faith by the Oireachtas, what the Minister has done is lightly lit and burnt much more hills than she would have done if she had heeded the advice of those who know what has been happening for 200 years on the hills. There has always been burning, but one of the problems is, because of destocking of sheep, there is much more wood growing and heather growing into woody heather in the hills and it is much more likely to go up in flames. By not controlling this - controlled burning requires permission and one must do it in certain ways - the Minister will lose more hillside this way than she would have if we had applied the regulation and those who say otherwise do not understand the issue.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I thank the committee members. It was helpful to hear all of them collectively on this subject.

Deputy Ó Cuív is correct. Originally, it was a broader proposal but the original Bill did not align the road safety legislation with the Wildlife Acts. As the Deputy will be aware, that was a Government amendment. There is no good faith breach here. There is no sharp practice. I take exception to that and to the Deputy stating that democracy is not at work on the basis that I had the discretion to make these regulations or not. I hear what the Deputy is saying. From the Government's perspective, there are people in my own party who very much wanted these regulations to go ahead and it is not a decision that I made lightly. However, we were in a different situation than we were when the Bill was initiated in 2016.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The Minister could clarify that.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I did not interrupt Deputy Ó Cuív.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: How is it different?

Chairman: Allow the Minister, please.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: If the Deputy wants, I will outline all the reasons again.

The biodiversity debate was in its infancy then and now we know much more than we did at that stage. As the committee will be aware, the rate of biodiversity decline is frightening. I have outlined all of these reasons to the Deputy. We are the last generation that can do anything about it and I felt a responsibility in relation to that. I was given the power to make these regulations and I had to make that decision. As I said, I did not do it lightly. I have heard everybody's concerns but if there are genuine agricultural reasons as well, one can still cut the hedges.

It may be of assistance - I am trying to see what we could possibly do to make it a little easier because I can hear vividly the frustrations of the Deputy's experience as a rural Deputy and that of his constituents - if we write to the local authorities and clarify the position from our perspective. It may be advisable, perhaps in conjunction with the relevant local authority, to remove hedgerows on a bad bend which might improve visibility and reduce risk of accident, in any event, on national roads.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: People get killed on minor roads too.

Chairman: We must move on.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: It is important to say that before the Bill, there was no cutting allowed at all in the closed season and now one can cut all year round for road safety.

Deputy Michael Collins: Rubbish.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: It is a fact. I got better than just August. I got a provision whereby one could cut for safety reasons the entire year round, which was not there previously.

Deputy Michael Collins: Democracy out the window.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: The reason I made the decision in relation to burning is there was no basis to allow it. On the basis of the information from Met Éireann's data, there was a very dry area during the six-month period when the burning of vegetation could have been undertaken under the law and it would not have precluded landowners from burning vegetation. Therefore, the existing provisions in the Wildlife Acts on burning remained in force for March of this year. That was the position in relation to burning, again, for different reasons.

Part of being a Minister is making decisions. It would have been easier for me to extend the regulations and I would not have had to deal with people having issues in relation to it. As I said, people in my own party wanted the regulations extended but it is not something that I was in a position, or minded, to do. I still stand by my decision. I have stated clearly that one can still cut the hedges for road safety reasons. I will write to the local authorities - that may assist and it might be helpful - and look at other ways that we might try and minimise the difficulties that the Deputies' constituents are having. I have heard what the Deputy said.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Will the Minister indemnify the local authorities if they use their discretion against being sued by people?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I will not indemnify anybody.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: This is the problem.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: That is not appropriate.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The second issue-----

Chairman: The issue has been well aired. The Deputies have had an opportunity to ask a question. Deputies are waiting to ask questions. I am moving on to Senator Hopkins and Deputy Niamh Smyth.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I was going to mention the rural issues. We can leave that and come back to it.

Senator Maura Hopkins: I have a question in relation to Natura lands. Last week I met IFA members who have concerns about financial supports. Obviously, it is quite limited in terms of farming practices. I seek an update from the Minister on any proposed plans or engagement with the IFA or relevant individuals on supporting farmers who have Natura lands.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I am meeting the IFA tomorrow and I can discuss that with the association. The National Parks and Wildlife Service has ongoing engagement with the IFA

with regard to designated lands and habitats. I can speak to them about that tomorrow.

Deputy Niamh Smyth: In the Minister's presentation and in the debate so far, biodiversity is of huge concern to her. We heard in recent days about the National Biodiversity Data Centre which, I am sure, feeds into much of the Minister's research in terms of Government policy. As the committee will be aware, the staff there are coming to the end of their contracts and do not seem to have any security in terms of where they or their organisation will be beyond 2019. The Government makes sweeping comments in support of biodiversity. However, I would assume that this would be an important agency for the Government's policy in the future. I wonder whether the Minister could comment on where she sees the National Biodiversity Data Centre and its staff being in 2020 and beyond.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: First, biodiversity is something the Government takes extremely seriously. We have approximately €60 million under the Project Ireland 2040 plan going specifically into biodiversity. As I said, I held the first biodiversity conference this year and we had 40 seeds of nature which was stemming from that. There are a number of biodiversity initiatives that we are currently implementing.

In relation to the data centre, it is not an agency. It is a name given to a programme which was established by the Heritage Council in 2006. It addressed the need identified by the council that data on Ireland's biodiversity be collected, recorded and fully accessible to the public. The programme has been operating under two publicly-tendered contracts entered into between the council and Compass Informatics, which is a private company. The team working on biodiversity data collection are employees of Compass Informatics, which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Tracsis plc. The Heritage Council is currently finalising a contract extension with Compass Informatics to collect biodiversity data into 2020. Concurrently, a review is being undertaken by the council and this is examining the governance and operating and financial models underpinning this work. The outcome of that review will inform the next request for tender. However, like all public contracts, this work is subject to public procurement rules. The Heritage Council's contract with Compass Informatics has been very important in the collection of biodiversity data for public policymaking and decision-making. Under the terms of its contract, the data collected are the intellectual property of the Heritage Council. The Heritage Council is the owner of the name, the National Biodiversity Data Centre, and rents the property in which the team works, so it is not a corporate entity, nor does it have a board or employees, nor, indeed, a bank account.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: I have three questions. With regard to hedge cutting, I welcome the Minister's statement that councils can cut hedges all year round as a safety measure, whether in regard to road bends or otherwise. Is that subject to a notifiable action or must the councils go through the National Parks and Wildlife Service? Has a council to fill up a form and send it off, stating that, for example, a bend on road R361 has to be done, or if the council does it as a safety measure, can it do it without someone from the National Parks and Wildlife Service being over-enthusiastic and bringing it to court, as we saw in a recent case?

On the turf compensation scheme, will the Minister give us an update on what money is still owed? Senator Hopkins touched on an issue whereby the different farming organisations have liaised with Mr. Niall Ó Donnchú and with the National Parks and Wildlife Service in regard to a burden on their property. They are looking for a fund in the budget and I understand they are talking about €10 million or €12 million. Does the Minister envisage such a fund in this budget to resolve those issues? I know she is meeting tomorrow with the farming organisations.

A report on conservation status has gone to Europe. I see that certain things have reached favourable conservation status and, in fairness, the picture may be looking better than some people, in particular environmentalists, try to make it out to be. The work that is being done by rural communities around the country should be acknowledged.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: As for hedge cutting, there is no need to notify the local authority if a person is cutting the hedge.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: Generally, it is the local authority that cuts them. If it is out cutting at a bad bend or at a crossroads, does the local authority have to notify the Department?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: No, it does not. Sorry, I thought the Deputy was asking the question the other way around.

With regard to the turf compensation scheme, we have about €8 million and that will be entirely spent, so any money owing will be paid.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: How much is left? I know there is a backlog.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: It was €8 million for the entire year and I can get the figure for exactly what is left. The Deputy mentioned we have the EU reasoned opinion in regard to turf cutting in the context of the 440 special areas of conservation, SACs, and we are looking at that as well. I have just been informed by my officials that 89% of the scheme funding has been spent so far and we will have it all spent by the end of the year.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: When does the Minister envisage that the rest will be paid back?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: It will be spent by the end of the year.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: In fairness, these people are burning the fuel now.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: We will get back to everybody. There is no difficulty with that.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: I also raised the issue of the meeting with farmers about the designation.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I am meeting the IFA tomorrow and I will let them know I spoke to the Deputy.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: I am not worried whether they know about me or not. I want to know if a budget is being put together for those farmers to try to resolve the issues. Obviously, there are 36 to 38 notifiable actions and farmers cannot farm their land in the same way. While some are designated for GLAS, has the Department put something together for the budget next week to resolve the issues?

Deputy Josepha Madigan: As the budgetary negotiations are ongoing, I am not in a position to say anything in that regard until 8 October.

Chairman: In the interests of efficiency, we will take programmes C and D together. I would ask the Minister and the Minister of State to make both of their opening statements and members may combine their questions for programmes C and D.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: Before we leave this section, I want to make one statement.

Why did we go to the trouble of looking for a Bill to cut the hedges in August if the local authorities could already have done it? This is the nonsense we are listening to.

Chairman: That is another matter, Deputy.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: Why did we look for it if it was already there?

Chairman: Thank you, Deputy. The Minister will respond very briefly and we will move on to programmes C and D.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I have given my reasons as best I can.

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Seán Kyne): Fáiltím roimh an deis seo labhairt leis an gcoiste inniu ar cheisteanna a bhaineann le clár C de chuid na Roinne maidir leis an nGaeilge, an Ghaeltacht agus na hOileáin, agus ar cheisteanna a bhaineann le clár D maidir le Foras na Gaeilge agus Gníomhaireacht na hUltaise.

Ba é €18.4 milliún an caiteachas iomlán do chlár C ag an 30 Meitheamh 2019. Ba é an caiteachas reatha i lár na bliana ná €13.6 milliún, nó 99% den phróifíl agus 37% den leithdháileadh iomlán don bhliain 2019. B'ionann caiteachas caipitil agus €4.8 milliún, nó 70% den phróifíl agus 36% den leithdháileadh iomlán.

Ó thaobh ár dteanga de, tá dul chun cinn maith á dhéanamh ar chur chun feidhme an phlean gníomhaíochta cúig bliana don Ghaeilge. Tá an chéad tuarascáil bhliantúil ar dhul chun cinn á hullmhú faoi láthair lena foilsíú.

Maidir leis an bpróiseas pleanála teanga, as na 26 limistéar pleanála teanga Gaeltachta atá ann, ceadaíodh 16 phlean go dtí seo. Is é an sprioc go gceadófar 23 cinn díobh faoi dheireadh na bliana.

Rinneadh dul chun cinn freisin ar Bhille na dteangacha oifigiúla (leasú) a dhréachtú. Anuas air sin, tá an sceideal a ghabhann le hAcht 2003 nuashonraithe den chéad uair ó 2006 ann agus tá sé á thabhairt trí na Tithe faoi láthair.

I mí Iúil, foilsíodh an tuarascáil ón gCoimisiún Eorpach don Chomhairle Eorpach ar an dul chun cinn atá á dhéanamh ag institiúidí an Aontais ar laghdú an mhaolaithe Gaeilge de réir a chéile a chur chun feidhme. Chuir mé an Chomh-Aireacht ar an eolas faoin tuarascáil tamaillín ina dhiaidh sin. Tuarascáil dhearfach a bhí inti den chuid is mó. Tugadh le fios gur cuireadh chun feidhme go hiomlán an chéad dá incrimint i dtreo deireadh a chur leis an maolú. Rinneadh dul chun cinn suntasach ar na gnéithe go léir den phlean gníomhaíochta a bhfuil mar aidhm leo deireadh a chur leis an maolú. Tá na hinstitiúidí tiomanta do chríoch a chur leis an maolú. Tá tiomantas agus comhar na hÉireann ag cur go mór leis an soláthar go dtí seo. Ag an deireadh ar fad, cuireadh an chéad chruinniú de chuid an choiste idir-rannaigh maidir le forbairt na n-oileán ar siúl an tseachtain seo caite. D'fhreastail ionadaithe ó Ranna Rialtais éagsúla air. Tabharfar faoi phróiseas comhairliúcháin fadréimseach anois chun eolas a dhéanamh d'fhorbairt an bheartais agus an phlean gníomhaíochta.

Maidir le clár D, tá obair thábhachtach Fhoras na Gaeilge agus Ghníomhaireacht na hUltaise ag leanúint le dul chun tairbhe do phobail ón dá thraidisiún ar an oileán i mbliana. Tá an caiteachas go dtí lár na bliana ar aon dul leis an bpróifíl a comhaontaíodh.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: Finally, a provision of €40.4 million is made available in 2019 to support the North-South co-operation programme area. Some 95% of this funding is used

to support initiatives by the two North-South implementation bodies, An Foras Teanga, which comprises Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency, and Waterways Ireland. These are also subject to the approval of the North-South Ministerial Council. Total gross programme expenditure under North-South co-operation up to the period ending 30 June 2019 was just over €19 million, representing 50% of the 2019 programme allocation. This expenditure had increased to €25.3 million as at 31 August 2019.

Waterways Ireland continues to focus on delivering its core activities and maintaining front-line services. In addition to the organisation's statutory function, Waterways Ireland has a strong community and business outreach and partnership policy which it continues to implement in 2019. As part of this policy, Waterways Ireland continues to engage with and deliver services for communities adjacent to the waterways to create social, recreational, health and economic benefits. I am happy to expand on any issues members would like to raise.

Chairman: Each member will have an absolute maximum of five minutes to contribute. We will try to get this meeting finished shortly if we can.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: With regard to the bean an tís, who bring children into their homes for two or three weeks to allow them to further their Irish language education, they do a wonderful job. They give their time and, in addition to feeding and keeping the youngsters, they take care of them and are responsible for them. They have done a wonderful job over the years. It has been brought to my attention, however, that they are getting significantly less in remuneration now than they were getting ten years ago. That is not satisfactory. I want that issue to be addressed. If we want to enhance, improve and increase the number of children or people speaking Irish, these are the people to whom we look. They are a vital cog in the wheel. I ask the Minister of State - who is from the Gaeltacht himself and on whom I am depending in this matter - to follow up on the bean an tí issue because they have made a wonderful contribution in the past and we want them to continue doing so.

People in Gaeltacht areas consistently highlight the fact that they receive less funding and that fewer industry projects are directed their way. They say that they do not get the same recognition as other areas and that Údarás na Gaeltachta funding has been cut drastically. These cuts began in the decline after the boom years, but the money has not been restored since. They are asking for proper recognition and attention given that the country is supposed to be turning around, even though there seems to be less and less money available for any area at which I look. They gave me figures but I do not have them with me now. They can vouch for the fact that they are being left behind. Built-up areas such as cities and bigger towns seem to find it easier to get funding than the rural Gaeltacht areas on which we depend for the retention of the Irish language part of our culture. If those people do not have the same opportunities as those in the rest of the country, they are going to disappear.

Deputy Michael Collins: With regard to the islands, the Minister of State mentioned an interdepartmental committee on island development. I am blessed that there are eight islands off my own constituency of Cork South-West. They are very active islands and, in fairness, they get a lot of support. I will not discredit any of the positive works going on there. We have Bere Island, Dursey, Whiddy, Sherkin, Cape Clear, Long Island and Heir Island. I have often mentioned Sherkin and Bere Island in here, perhaps more than most. People are worried out there. I go to meetings on the island and the first thing people are worried about is social housing. To start a new home, people now have to leave the island. I hope to be corrected, but I have not seen any funding set aside for social housing for people who need homes and who want to live on the islands in west Cork and start off their lives there.

That connects to the next issue, which is a long-running issue, that of chaperones for the school runs, particularly from Sherkin Island. It is the same with every other island as well. Mothers and fathers are trying to leave the island for work in the morning. They are then often caught out when the children have to go to school. Where the school on the island has been closed, somebody has to then accompany them. There was a verbal agreement that something would be done in respect of Sherkin. I am open to correction, but I do not think that has happened.

I will now refer to the medical services. People on the islands have worries. Islands such as Bere Island have significant populations. There is a nurse there but people are worried that this nurse is being gradually withdrawn and brought back to the mainland, leaving those on the island in a very vulnerable state. People can fall ill overnight. In many cases the nurse could cater for those needs rather than having to get to mainland, a trip which can, in bad weather, involve the emergency services.

The island people are very proud to live on the island but they are worried and concerned that their futures may be dwindling away. Populations are falling. That can be seen. In saying that, services are improving to a degree. One can look to the ferry service on Whiddy Island, run by Tim O'Leary. That is a fabulous set-up. A lot of good work is being undertaken by individuals but there are still concerns. I hope the interdepartmental committee on islands will focus on the issues of social housing, chaperones, and medical services.

Chairman: I will put a few questions of my own and then the Minister and Minister of State can respond as they see fit. Tá formhór mo chuid dírithe chuig an Aire Stáit ar a bhfuil freagracht as an nGaeltacht. Ar an gcéad dul síos, an bhfuil sé i gceist scéim labhairt na Gaeilge a thabhairt ar ais chun cabhrú le pleanáil teanga sa Ghaeltacht? Ó thaobh mo dara ceist, bhí díomá ar dhaoine gurbh é an daonáireamh deireanach an chéad dhaonáireamh le cuid mhaith blianta ina raibh titim ar líon na nGaeilgeoirí le feiceáil. An bhfuil fiosrúchán déanta? An bhfuil aon eolas ag an Aire Stáit maidir leis an fáth gur tharla sé sin? An raibh baint ag na ciorruithe in Údarás na Gaeltacha, deireadh scéim labhairt na Gaeltachta, nó deireadh na n-allúntas Gaeilge leis an titim? Cad é an chúis gur thit sé seo amach? Tá fadhbanna ann ó thaobh gardaí a earcú nó a lonnú sa Ghaeltacht de bharr easpa an liúntas Gaeltachta a bhíodh ann. Níl an tAire Stáit freagrach as seo ach an bhfuil sé i gceist aige labhairt leis an Aire le cinntiú go bhfuil go leor gardaí sa Ghaeltacht? Ceann de na hábhair is mó inní do phobal na Gaeltachta ó thaobh maoiniú dé ná go raibh Foras na Gaeilge agus Údarás na Gaeltachta i measc na n-eagraíochtaí a fuair ciorraithe móra ar dtús. Tá an cuma ar an scéal go bhfuil siad i measc na n-eagraíochtaí is déanaí a fuair aon méadú, agus is lú an méadú atá faighte acu nuair a chuirtear i gcomparáid le roinnt de na n-eagraíochtaí faoi stiúir an Roinn seo é. Tá sé go breá go bhfaigheann siad an maoiniú sin agus go bhfuil an maoiniú sin tar éis fás, ach níl an méadú maith go leor ó thaobh Údarás na Gaeltachta de agus bhí laghdú le Foras na Gaeilge le blianta beaga anuas. Tá gá le ardú suntasach ó thaobh Foras na Gaeilge de le tacú le cúrsaí ar nós scéim pobal Gaeilge. Baineann sé sin le cúrsaí sa Tuaisceart freisin. Tá gá le maoiniú ar an dá thaobh den Teorainn. Rinne an Teachta Danny Healy-Rae tagairt do cé chomh deacair a bhfuil sé tionscal agus fostaíocht a thabhairt go dtí an Ghaeltacht agus go bhfuil níos mó tacaíocht ag teastáil ansin.

An rud is mó atá ann ná an laghdú a bhíodh ann agus an easpa dul chun cinn atá feicthe againn ó shin ó thaobh buiséad Foras na Gaeilge agus buiséad Údarás na Gaeltachta de. I ask the Minister and the Minister of State to reply to the various questions.

Deputy Seán Kyne: I agree with Deputy Danny Healy-Rae about the mná tí. They do a wonderful and important job and in many cases they shape young people's lives, sometimes

when it is the first time these young people have been away from home for several weeks. I increased funding for the mná tí two years ago for the first time in years. We recently increased the length of the season, which had been pretty much confined to the summer and the off-school period. We now have schemes through the winter period to improve opportunities. University College Cork will have a semester programme where the mná tí from Kerry will take in students. That has extended the season. Future plans for funding for the mná tí will be kept under consideration where funding is available. I agree the mná tí do an important job.

Údarás na Gaeltachta has many ambitious and worthwhile plans and we are constantly seeking funding for the agency. At every opportunity in recent years where there has been spare money in the Roinn towards the end of the year, we have diverted it towards Údarás na Gaeltachta. There are many examples of that. For example, in 2016, there was an additional capital application of €2.4 million arising from savings made elsewhere. Additional funding of €2.27 million was provide in 2017 and an addition €638,000 was provided in 2018. In addition, an underspend of €700,000 was carried forward into 2019. Where there are opportunities to push money towards Údarás na Gaeltachta, we are taking them. We have increased the overall capital funding from €6 million in 2011 to €9.7 million in 2019. We hope to be able to provide funding of €12 million, as Údarás na Gaeltachta has asked, in the coming years to place it on a more sustainable footing and enable it to plan. Údarás na Gaeltachta has a critical role in the Gaeltacht areas. It provides employment where there would be very little otherwise. We continue to provide funding opportunities. We will know more about the 2020 figures next week.

Deputy Michael Collins mentioned the interdepartmental committee, which met for the first time on 24 September. Representatives of all Departments were in attendance. I have asked each Department to come back within three weeks with its plans. Some of them have comprehensive plans. For example, the Deputy noted that the HSE may have a plan for the islands. Other Departments have engagement with islands in other areas. For example, the Department of Education and Skills has policies in place on island schools, including the pupil-teacher ratio. I have asked all Department to come back within three weeks with a view to preparing a draft policy we can put out to public consultation. I assure the Deputy that we will engage with all islands and officials will travel to all islands in the coming months to engage with communities on the draft policy and ask for their suggestions. I hope we will then finalise the process with the Department towards the end of the year or early next year. That is an important area.

We asked all Departments to briefly outline their plans and their work on the various issues. I raised the social housing issues to which the Deputy referred. This is a big problem on islands. As we know, getting one family to stay on or move to a small island can make a major difference in ensuring the future of that island. It is even better to get two families with children who will attend the island schools. Pupil numbers have fallen on certain islands and increased on others. It depends on the proximity to the coastline and the overall size of the island. There are challenges, of which we are conscious. The last time we had an all-of-Government plan for the islands was in 1997. That is why we agreed to set up this interdepartmental committee, at the request of the islanders. More important will be ensuring that funding matches the islands policy and the action plan that might develop from it. That will probably be a matter for the next Government, whoever that might be. I agree with the Deputy in regard to nursing and social housing that there are requirements and unique challenges in the island communities.

As the Deputy knows, since the primary school on Sherkin Island closed, the Department has provided funding for an additional ferry service in the morning to facilitate the island children. A number of islanders requested changes to the ferry timetable and this request was

agreed to. The Department met the ferry operator and island representatives about these changes and a new timetable has been agreed. We have not been able to come to a conclusion on the proposal for a chaperone, although I raised the matter again at the interdepartmental committee last week with the Department of Education and Skills. I have said on a few occasions that the two Departments must find a solution, which may mean either Department or both Departments providing funding to Cork County Council to provide a chaperone. It is not something that will set a precedent because other schools on islands will not have a daily ferry in operation as they are too far from the mainland. The circumstances on Sherkin Island were unique given the proximity of Baltimore and the decision by parents to start bringing children to Baltimore in any event. The Departments need to find a solution, perhaps in conjunction with Cork County Council.

Tagraím do na ceisteanna a chuir an Cathaoirleach agus freagróidh mé an ceann mar gheall ar Údarás na Gaeltachta i dtús báire. Glacaimid gach uile seans a bhíonn againn cur leis an airgead atá ag Údarás na Gaeltachta. Rinneamar é i 2016 nuair a cuireadh €2.4 milliún ar fáil. Cuireadh €2.27 milliún sa bhreis ar fáil arís i 2017 agus €638,000 sa bhreis i 2018. Tá buiséad de €9.7 milliún ann anois agus táimid ag iarraidh dul suas go dtí €12 milliún. Sin atá ó grúpaí cosúil le Conradh na Gaeilge agus bhí lá stocaireachta aige coicís ó shin ar son Údarás na Gaeltachta, ar son na Gaeltachta agus ar son na Gaeilge. Tá Údarás na Gaeltachta ag lorg €12 milliún in aghaidh na bliana agus táimid ag obair agus ag breathnú ar na figiúirí maidir leis an gcéad cáinainéis eile, agus beidh scéal, mar is eol don gCathaoirleach, an seachtain seo chugainn. Tá airgead curtha ar fáil ón Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail agus ón Aire, An Teachta Ring, freisin ón gciste um athghiniúint agus forbairt tuaithe. Bíonn comhpháirtíocht ansin idir Údarás na Gaeltachta agus an Roinn ó thaobh an GTeic de mar shampla. Tá airgead curtha ar fáil do GTeic sa Spidéal agus i nGaoth Dobhair agus in áiteanna eile. Tá an chomhpháirtíocht sin fíorthábhachtach agus bíonn breis acmhainní ar fáil ón Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail. Tá tábhacht ar leith leis an údarás ó thaobh na gceantar Gaeltachta. Bhí ócáid iontach againn an tseachtain seo caite nuair a sheolamar na gréasáin dhigiteacha GTeic go hoifigiúil. Tá pleananna ag an údarás tríocha gréasáin GTeic a chur ar bun trasna na Gaeltachta agus na n-oileán agus go mbeidh seacht gcinn breise le hoscailt roimh dheireadh na bliana. Is fíorthábhachtach, nua-aimseartha agus rud a dteastaíonn sna ceantair tuaithe é seo, áiteanna nach bhfuil an tseirbhís leathanbhanda chomh tapa agus chomh hardchaighdeán agus a dteastaítear ann. Tá ról tábhachtach ag an na gréasáin GTeic iontu agus tá sárobair ar siúl ag an údarás ansin.

Ó thaobh scéim labhairt na Gaeilge de, níl sé i gceist an scéim sin a thabhairt ar ais. Bhí díomá orainn maidir le líon na gcainteoirí Gaeilge i dtorthaí an daonáirimh 2016. Táimid ag obair leis an CSO maidir le ceisteanna nua a bhaineann leis an nGaeilge.

Maidir leis an bpróiseas earcaíochta sa Gharda Síochána, is é sin ceann de na spriocanna atá leagtha amach sa Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge go mbeidh ról ag an nGarda Síochána i dtaca le hearcaíocht. Chas mé féin leis an joint policing committee i gcathair na Gaillimhe agus leis an gCoimisinéir Drew Harris, sílim, ag tús na bliana. Tá sé ar an eolas faoin tábhacht atá ag earcaíocht daoine a bhfuil in ann seirbhís agus a jab a dhéanamh trí mheán na Gaeilge. Táim i dteagmháil leis an ard-cheannfort i nGaillimh, ceantar a bhfuil stáisiún na nGardaí aige sa Ghaeltacht. Bíonn siad ag lorg gardaí i gcónaí a bhfuil in ann an tseirbhís sin a chur ar fáil trí mheán na Gaeilge. Tá sé dúshlánach ach ag an am céanna tá An Garda Síochána ar an eolas faoin tábhacht seo agus tá sé leagtha amach go hoifigiúil sa Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge.

Chairman: For the benefit of the Minister, Deputy Madigan, I emphasise some of the points I made to the Minister of State, Deputy Kyne, although I do not require a response to them.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: I can respond.

Chairman: The Minister of State identified a desire to increase funding to Údarás na Gaeltachta to 2011 levels, which would mean annual funding of €12 million funding. In 2008, the agency received funding of €25 million. Funding is still a long way off where it was a little over ten years.

On Foras na Gaeilge, since 2014 there has been a 5% reduction of funding for the Irish language sector and its organisations. These two organisations support many other organisations. Conradh na Gaeilge and the Gaelscoileanna rely on funding from Foras na Gaeilge. There is a feeling that the sector is not recovering to the same extent as many other sectors, not only in terms of the Department but across Government as a whole.

Deputy Josepha Madigan: The Minister of State set out the increases in funding. We are always reluctant to talk about 2008 figures as a benchmark because spending at that time was unsustainable. There are ongoing budgetary negotiations. I formally delegated formally to the Minister of State, Deputy Kyne, the function of representing the Gaeltacht and the islands. I am also doing a significant amount of work in policy areas throughout the Department. For example, with Creative Ireland, we are dealing with Ealaín na Gaeltachta and having arts for the Gaeltacht looked at for children. There is a clár teic space for children in the Irish language and there are Irish language officers, through the auspices of Creative Ireland, now in the local authorities on the cultural teams. I note and accept the points the Chairman makes.

Deputy Seán Kyne: Gabh mo leithscéal ach rinne me dearmad freagra a thabhairt don choiste maidir le Foras na Gaeilge. Mar is eol don choiste is é an deacracht atá sa Tuaisceart faoi láthair nach bhfuil an Rialtas nó an tionól i bhfeidhm. Is é an buiséad a bhí leagtha amach dó an ceann a bhí leagtha amach dó le cúpla bliain anuas. Tá airgead tugtha díreach ag an Roinn do cheanneagraíochtaí, mar shampla: Foras na Gaeilge, Glór na Gael, Culture Club, Cartlann Athbheochan na Gaeilge, an scéim Gluaiseacht de chuid Chonradh na Gaeilge áit a mbíonn siad ag dul amach chuig na scoileanna ag cur páistí ar an eolas faoi na deiseanna atá ar fáil sa Gaeltacht agus poist trí mheán na Gaeilge in Éirinn agus san Eoraip. Tá airgead curtha ar aghaidh ar maidin, tráth a sheol mé €683,000 thar thrí bliana do Ghlór na Gael chun Fondúireacht Sheosaimh Mhic Dhonncha, agus scéim an Gaelbhrataigh a chur chun cinn. Táim ag tabhairt airgead go díreach chuig na ceanneagraíochtaí, cé nach bhfuil an deis againn níos mó airgid a thabhairt d'Fhoras na Gaeilge mar gheall ar an gcéatadán agus na fadhbanna sa Tuaisceart.

Chairman: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire Stáit. I ask the Minister and the Minister of State to maintain a focus on those organisations.

This concludes our consideration of this matter. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire, Teachta Madigan, leis an Aire Stáit, Teachta Kyne, agus le hoifigh na Roinne as a gcúnamh sa choiste inniu. I propose that we suspend meeting for a few minutes before resuming in private session to deal with housekeeping matters.

The joint committee suspended at 4.26 p.m., went into private session at 4.28 p.m. and adjourned at 4.35 p.m. until 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 16 October 2019.