

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM IOMPAR AGUS CUMARSÁID

JOINT COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS

Dé Céadaoin, 23 Meán Fómhair 2015

Wednesday, 23 September 2015

The Joint Committee met at 11 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Michael Colreavy,	Senator Sean D. Barrett,
Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice,	Senator Terry Brennan.
Deputy Tom Fleming,	
Deputy Brendan Griffin,	
Deputy Noel Harrington,	
Deputy Seán Kenny,	
Deputy Helen McEntee,	
Deputy Patrick O'Donovan,	

In attendance: Deputy Colm Keaveney and Senator Mark Daly.

DEPUTY JOHN O'MAHONY IN THE CHAIR.

The joint committee met in private session until 12 noon.

Inland Fisheries Ireland: Chairperson Designate

Chairman: The purpose of the meeting is to engage with the chairperson designate of Inland Fisheries Ireland to discuss the approach he proposes to take if appointed to the role and his views on the challenges facing that body. By this stage, members are well aware of the Government's decision in May 2011 to put new arrangements in place for the appointment of persons to State boards and bodies. Reference to this arrangement is also made in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform guidelines on appointments to State boards of November 2014. The joint committee welcomes the opportunity to meet the chairperson designate to hear his views and trusts this provides for greater transparency in the process of appointments to State boards and bodies.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome Mr. Fintan Gorman.

By virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the committee. However, if they are directed by the Chairman 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 or make charges against any person or an entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. I advise witnesses that any submission or opening statement they have made to the committee will be published on its website after the 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.

I invite Mr. Gorman to make his opening statement.

Mr. Fintan Gorman: Tá an-áthas orm agus tá mé fíor-bhuíoch deis a fháil dul os comhair an choiste seo mar chuid den phróiseas ceapacháin mar chathaoirleach ar Bhord Iascaigh Intíre Éireann. I am very grateful to have the opportunity to address the committee as part of the process of being appointed as the chairman of Inland Fisheries Ireland. Inland Fisheries Ireland, IFI, was established on 1 July 2010 following the amalgamation of the Central Fisheries Board and seven Regional Fisheries Boards. The main functions of IFI, as identified in the 2010 Act, are: "to promote, support, facilitate and advise the Minister on the conservation, protection, management, marketing, development and improvement of inland fisheries, including sea angling."

The 2010 to 2015 period has been a time of huge change and consolidation for Ireland and for the fisheries sector. Its establishment, unfortunately, coincided with the economic collapse and the ravages of the recessionary period have had serious consequences for IFI. Between 2009 and 2014, staff levels at IFI reduced from 440 to 298, a reduction of 32%. To put this in context, the overall State agency staff numbers have reduced by 18.2% and the overall Civil Service numbers have reduced by 9.2% over the same period. Therefore, IFI has lost almost four times more staff than the wider Civil Service average and the overall budget of the agency has decreased by 15%.

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Despite the serious reduction in manpower and financial resources available to it, IFI has continued to maintain a 24 hour a day, seven days a week fisheries service on Ireland's 74,000 km of rivers and streams, 128,000 ha of lakes and over 5,500 km of coastline. This has been made possible by the innovation and commitment of the board, management and staff. Necessity is the mother of invention, and work practices at IFI have fundamentally changed the way it does its business.

IFI staff now use a range of hi-tech equipment to target specific "hot spot" areas and increase operational efficiency. This includes kayaks, which are being used to conduct silent patrols along river and lake shores; all-terrain vehicles, which are being used on some of the country's beaches to patrol for illegal bass fishing; personal water craft, including jet-skis, which are being used to patrol shallow estuarine areas which previously would have been inaccessible to RIBs; larger RIBs, which are being used to launch dawn patrols on coastal areas, and officers go well out to sea under the cover of darkness and then approach coastal areas at first light; and night vision scopes, thermal imaging equipment and long-range spotting scopes, which are being used to great effect. In 2014, staff seized 372 nets extending to 20.72 km. This level of seizures illustrates the positive result of overt and covert patrols but, in reality, is just a percentage of the total number of illegal nets.

It is this spirit of innovation and co-operation which has helped IFI to develop as a professional agency and enabled it to fulfil its mandate in adverse financial circumstances. During the first five years of its existence, IFI has established its headquarters in a modern, fit-for-purpose building in Citywest and it continues to consolidate and upgrade its facilities in the regions. It has adopted a recognisable staff work-wear, engaged in extensive research projects and produced innovative policies for the management of trout, pike and bass fisheries. I compliment the outgoing chairman, Mr. Brendan O'Mahony, past and present board members, the CEO, Dr. Ciaran Byrne, and management and staff on their sterling efforts in the protection and development of our fisheries.

IFI is a public benefit entity with a small budget and a large national mandate. Most people are probably unaware of its existence but it provides great benefit to rural communities and the nation in general. The economic contribution of angling to the Republic of Ireland stands at over €836 million per annum and is estimated to support in excess of 11,350 jobs. Some 446,000 individuals participated in recreational angling in Ireland in 2014, which is 7.5% of the population based on a Millward Brown omnibus survey of 2014. This includes Northern Ireland and visitors. Some 132,000 of these anglers came from overseas. A 2014 Fáilte Ireland survey indicates that Britain accounts for approximately one third of our overseas anglers while 59% come from mainland Europe, with Germany being the single largest continental market at 24%.

Fáilte Ireland estimates that approximately 2% of all overseas visitors are angling tourists, which equates to 132,000 visitors per annum. All this angling activity provides a great economic spin-off to hotels, restaurants, bed and breakfasts and tackle shops. Angling is the life blood of many peripheral communities and it provides jobs in areas that have been ravaged by unemployment and emigration.

IFI currently employs approximately 230 fishery officers around the country and they engage in vital stock protection, habitat protection and research work. The future health of Ireland's angling resource is dependent on ensuring that our fish populations are protected and conserved. Our fisheries are a precious asset. If one does not protect and invest in an asset it diminishes in value. Having provided a brief outline of the sterling work that IFI is doing with

limited resources to conserve the great national asset that is our fisheries, I will now outline a vision of the enormous potential that our unique fisheries and our pristine waters present if we are willing to nurture, market and invest.

The age profile of anglers is worrying. We can and must engage a new generation in angling. To do this we need to encourage the development of accessible fisheries around the country, in many cases focusing on urban dwellers. These models have been proven internationally, and an example of one successful model is the Go Fish BC, an initiative supported by the Freshwater Fisheries Society of British Columbia. We also have to support entry into angling through appropriate and targeted education and coaching programmes, such as those run by many of the angling federations and the Dublin angling initiative.

If our unique angling resource is to be positively exploited to its potential we need to provide trained knowledgeable guides with local expert knowledge. There are viable career opportunities here. Participation levels in angling are directly related to the quality of the product. Provide good fishing and the world will beat a path to your door. Investment in the product will re-engage lapsed anglers and increase participation levels. IFI has concrete, verifiable evidence to prove the definite link between quality of resource and participation levels. The 1994-99 tourism angling management, TAM, programme saw the targeted investment of £17 million in our fisheries. By 1999, overseas angler numbers peaked at 173,000.

These are not pipedreams but are some of the strategies, methodologies and projects that IFI have researched, examined, costed and documented as part of the soon-to-be-launched national strategy for angling development, NSAD. The strategy marks a significant milestone in the development of our national fisheries resource and will act as a roadmap for the development of Ireland's angling sector in the future. The extensively researched background material for the strategy lists projects such as the Owenmore River, Ballynahinch, County Galway; the Easkey River, a salmon river in Sligo; Lough Sheelin trout fishery in Cavan; the River Shanowen game fishery in Kerry; the salmon fishery in Lough Currane, County Kerry; and the coarse and pike angling fishery in Lough Ramor in Cavan.

An investment of at least €25 million will be required to deliver this strategy nationally over the period of 2016 to 2020. In return, it has the potential to grow the economic contribution of angling from its current level of €836 million to €900 million per annum and, in the process, support an extra 1,400 jobs in local areas. A properly financed and resourced implementation of the national strategy for angling development, NSAD, will be a game-changer for domestic and tourist angling and the depopulated rural communities that are ever more reliant on sustainable home-grown jobs.

IFI is currently completing its second five-year corporate plan for presentation to the Minister. IFI recognises and appreciates that if it is to deliver the vision I have outlined, it will need to change its current *modus operandi*. Business as usual will not do. The 2010-2015 corporate plan outlines in detail the main roles of IFI under five specific headings - fish, habitat, stakeholders, staff and corporate management. Specifically, the plan envisages considerable change in the way it proposes to assist stakeholders in the process of securing funds from various agencies to carry out developmental work. Communication and education are the other areas that will require change and improvement to meet the needs and expectations of our stakeholders and deliver on our vision for increased participation and employment.

IFI does not currently have the staff or funding to engage in the number or scale of development projects that will be necessary to provide the kind of boost that the tourism angling

measure, TAM, project delivered. However, we need that type of habitat and infrastructural development if we are to achieve the targets envisaged in NSAD. We demonstrated that we could work smarter by using technology in our surveillance and protection work. We now need to enter a constructive partnership with locally based groups and be similarly creative and innovative in our approach to development.

At the start of this statement I provided some contextual information in relation to the changes in staff numbers and the budget of IFI during the past five years. We have now reached, I hope, a plateau, and can continue the development of the organisation from this base level. I, as chairman designate, and the board generally are resolute in our focus on improving the ability of the staff of IFI to deliver service in an effective and efficient manner. With extremely demanding and often dangerous work being the norm for IFI staff, the age profile of the operational personnel is a serious concern. We have virtually no staff under the age of 30 and in the coming three years, significant numbers of senior operational staff will reach retirement age, leading to commensurate loss of corporate memory and experience. The current corporate plan takes account of this situation.

IFI is currently operating under legislation that is extremely outdated. We urgently need up to date and fit for purpose fisheries legislation. The principal Act under which the service operates is the Fisheries (Consolidation) Act 1959, which, as its name suggests, is actually a consolidation of previous fisheries Acts, some of which go back to the 1920s. We look pleadingly to Dáil Éireann in the hope and anticipation that game-changing, modernising legislation will be provided.

Aquatic invasive species, AIS, have the potential to be environmental wreckers in the short to medium term. Ireland has yet to work out a clear policy response to this threat. The increasing mobility of our people and the increased number of visitors to this country will only serve to accelerate the rate of introduction and spread of AIS if appropriate border controls and regulation are not introduced. This can only be achieved with robust implementation of effective legislation. If and when Dáil Éireann provides the legislation, IFI will be an active and willing participant in the co-ordinated response to the threat posed by aquatic invasive species. The good news is, angling is uniquely placed to deliver benefits across the less-developed areas of the country. Just imagine what can be achieved with a little further investment targeted at the areas envisaged in the NSAD.

I realise that the primary function of this hearing is to assess my suitability for the role of chairman of IFI. In that context, I wish to provide to the committee information on my background and the credentials that I hope will prove useful in successfully fulfilling my role. I have been a public servant for almost 40 years. I retired from my position as principal of the national school in Cong, County Mayo, in September 2014. My career as a public servant gives me a deep understanding of the ethos and governance requirements of public benefit entities and my role as a teacher and principal helped me to develop the vital people and managerial skills necessary to develop and lead a successful team. It is impossible to live in Cong without having a sense of fishing but my interest in fisheries is more from the perspective of ecology, heritage, history, amenity and economic value, associated flora and fauna and the outdoor healthy recreational value.

I have been privileged and honoured to serve on the board of IFI since Sept 2013. I have attended and fully participated in all board meetings and also serve on the development sub-committee, as well as chairman of the audit committee until my appointment as chairman designate. I have actively participated in the extensive consultation process with angling clubs and

federations in regard to the soon to be launched national angling development plan. I attended all meetings of the national inland fisheries forum where participants avail of the opportunity to outline their concerns and desires to the board and executive of IFI. During my time on the board I have participated in a number of courses and briefings on governance and, as a member of the audit committee, I have interacted directly with the Comptroller and Auditor General and IFI's internal auditors on matters such as the audit plan, the annual accounts and the findings of various internal audits which have been undertaken. In this regard, I believe I have a good understanding of the governance requirements involved in chairing the board of a State agency and ensuring it is run in accordance with the principles set out in the revised code of practice for the governance of State agencies.

During the past few months, the main focus of the board and executive has been on the production and delivery of the 2010–2015 corporate plan and the national strategy for angling development, NSAD. Given my interest in and input into both of these documents, it would be fair to say they represent a major part of my vision for IFI over the coming years. I believe that having a strong link between the development of the corporate plan and the national strategy, as a board member and delivering on it as Chairman, will be of significant benefit to IFI in terms of driving the agency forward and enabling it to reach its potential.

I retired from my position as principal of the local primary school in 2014 and I am now in a position to devote all the time that is needed to effectively carry out the demanding role of chairman of Inland Fisheries Ireland. I feel confident that I have the knowledge, energy, commitment, enthusiasm and necessary skills to effectively advance the strategic core objectives of the board in the interest of all involved in Inland Fisheries Ireland. My active participation and involvement in board policy development, as outlined, affords me the knowledge and insight to seamlessly continue the policies, strategies and working relationships that have proved so beneficial to the organisation since its inception. I am pleased and honoured to be nominated as chairman designate of IFI and I hope that this committee will, having considered my submission, be in a position to endorse my appointment. Go raibh maith agaibh.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Gorman for outlining what IFI has done, is doing and hopes to do and for outlining his vision for improvement. Before handing over to Deputy Keaveney, I wish to raise the issue of water quality. Is water quality improving, has it got worse and what effect does it have on angling?

Mr. Fintan Gorman: Water quality is inextricably linked with the viability of our angling product. Fish are an aquatic species and water quality is the main determinant of the viability of our fisheries. Never has the demand on quality water been so great as it is now. Changing demographics are imposing strains on it, as are increasing industrialisation, urbanisation, intensive agriculture and climate change. All of these are imposing significant strains on water quality and quantity. Some of the biggest challenges to fish populations come from poorly regulated, managed and maintained municipal water systems.

Inland Fisheries Ireland recognises that rural environment protection schemes and other environmental programmes undertaken in agriculture have had a significant benefit for water quality and have removed some of the strain. We still realise that increasing agricultural production will prove problematic if more controls are not put in place.

We recognise and welcome the establishment of Irish Water from the perspective that it provides one national body that will be responsible for water quality and, according to the legislation, provide for planned capital investment in the municipal water system, mostly in respect of

water going out. With regard to fisheries and water quality, having 42 towns in which untreated sewage is still discharged into waterways is unsustainable. Our hope is a single national agency, rather than a plethora of agencies, may be able to address that detrimental situation for angling.

Deputy Colm Keaveney: Mr. Gorman is very welcome. I congratulate him on his very strong and committed presentation. Clearly, he is passionate about this area. I am sure the industry or pastime is deeply embedded in the heritage of Cong. Despite Mr. Gorman being a Mayoman, we are neighbours. His presentation was excellent. There is a consistent thread or theme on which I would like him to elaborate. Obviously, there is a very strong business case that is riddled with references to hope, employment, investment and a net return for communities. This is critical to Mr. Gorman's strategic submission. It is a labour and project-intensive programme. I would like him to elaborate on what is required to achieve the maximum return and sweat this product out as much as possible. What central investment is required for him to have an acceptable level of whole-time equivalents to stay on top of the product and ensure it is being protected with a labour-intensive programme? How much is needed to bring it up to the required standard?

While I wish Mr. Gorman the very best of luck in the process of his appointment, I have grave concerns about the decrease in the number of whole-time equivalents. It is a critical regional and rural product. I am greatly alarmed by the percentage of staff who have been lost, considering the benchmark across the public service. There is an urban myth that every shore or bank for trout or salmon is worth €800 to the economy. This is a significant natural environmental resource in which we need to invest significantly and which we need to protect. As Mr. Gorman highlighted, he has grave concerns about the future viability of the product if we are not investing in programmes based on the integration of elements that have newer and younger dimensions.

I live on the banks of the River Clare. When Mr. Gorman refers to future legislation, does he believe there is a role for his organisation in enforcement? HIQA is responsible for the establishment of health standards and engages in enforcement, makes recommendations and establishes timelines. The Mental Health Commission has a timeline for the enforcement of capital expenditure, upgrading or standards improvements. These are enforceable in law. Does Mr. Gorman envisage a comprehensive environmental enforcement role for a statutory authority to achieve investment in something that obviously gives rise to grave concerns?

I am concerned about the slippage in investment and budgets and the decrease in staff numbers. This results in a diminished authority. How does one protect that authority with stronger legislation that has enforcement and give it the authority to set timelines, projections and investments that will be honoured if we are going to protect such a significant natural resource? Issues that arise include pollution, the need for investment in riverbanks, remedial works and unforeseen crises such as the identification of invasive species like the zebra mussel and so on. Does the authority have a contingency resource or does it have to knock on the door of the Exchequer? Can it set an enforcement procedure that precipitates an obligation on behalf of Government to give it the resources to address an immediate crisis?

Mr. Fintan Gorman: The Deputy's observations are music to our ears because this is the point we are making. We accept that in the economic circumstances in which we found ourselves for the past while, we could not expect to be prioritised over services like health, education and welfare but we now recognise that the rising tide is coming in and may lift all boats. We believe that for the type of investment we talked about - €25 million over five years - we can produce a much improved protection service and far higher participation in angling for the

domestic market and the tourism sector. In respect of increasing angling levels, the evidence is there from the TAM project from 1994 to 1999 that if one invests in the product, more people will come and spend their money in peripheral areas and it will benefit the economy.

The Deputy asked me about the co-ordination of the service we can provide. Basically, the service is laid out by the 2010 legislation but the Deputy is right. It could be rationalised. We seek to protect the river and its fish species but if there is a problem with badgers or foxes up along the river, the National Parks and Wildlife Service will come up behind us doing another patrol. However, it cannot interfere with some lad reefing the fish population. Likewise, our officers cannot intervene if they see wildlife getting involved, so there is room for rationalisation and co-ordination. What we must do for our investment and what we can do for the little investment we are looking for is to follow the model of other countries.

Angling is a lifelong recreational activity. It is healthy, outdoors and available to almost everyone in this country because there is no place that does not have a waterway. I have dealt with young children all my life and I bring them out. I live within a stone's throw of Lough Mask and can invite anyone out to fish on the lough. We might see no fish for three days so any youngster will tell you that it is dull, boring and not cool and they will not come again. If I was willing to do what is being done on the reservoirs in England or what has been done in British Columbia, if we were willing to invest in a mountain and stock it with little lakes with rainbow trout and if I could bring those same two children and guarantee them that I would pay my tenner and they would get two fish, they would be into fishing. After a while with that experience, they would say, "Bring me out on Lough Mask. I might only catch one fish in two days but it's different - wild, native brown trout. Bring me down to the River Feale. Catch me a wild salmon". That is how we must do it. We must move with the times. We need starter lakes.

As the Deputy said, we need to be much smarter in the way we do our business. We need to introduce information and communications technology in all our business. I will give one example. Salmon licences are a semi-lucrative form of income for Inland Fisheries Ireland. Under legislation, we are not allowed to put the salmon licensing system online. Our officers must go around to hundreds of shops every year and leave in a book of salmon licences. They must then come back and try to collect the book, the licences and the money. Of course, when they come back the shop owner is not there so they might have to come back two or three times. Imagine the waste of resources involved in that process when the fisheries officer could be involved in protection.

Chairman: What is the reason for that?

Mr. Fintan Gorman: The Fisheries (Consolidation) Act 1959 is so prescriptive, it simply does not allow it. This is why I am stating that in this respect and several other respects, it is crying out for modernisation. Only Dáil Éireann can do it for us.

Deputy Colm Keaveney: In respect of enforcement, I am aware of some unfinished estates with wastewater treatment that has collapsed. There is significant ambiguity about the legal status and about who owns what. There are 70% complete estates which are on the most prestigious rivers in the world and have the potential to cause significant long-term damage to the product. Does Mr. Gorman envisage, in that legislation, being able to precipitate enforcement guidelines and procedures, for example, with regard to a local authority? Across a number of agencies, such as IFI, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Health and Safety Authority of Ireland, nobody seems to know which is the senior enforcement authority protecting the natural heritage and wildlife in the rivers and on their banks. There is a significant falling

between stools in terms of where the community can go to address this with an authority and under specific guidelines.

Mr. Fintan Gorman: We are one of the statutory bodies that reports. For example, we would be called in to do the scientific work on a river where there has been a pollution spill, or the like. However, regulation of sewerage and water systems falls within the remit of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, and we are just a notifiable body. I agree with the Deputy that there is a need for a co-ordinated, methodical approach because we have a vital national asset in water quality, the fish habitat and the recreational amenity. If we do not protect that and invest in it, like any other asset, it diminishes in value and eventually becomes worthless.

Chairman: Joined-up thinking is what is needed.

Deputy Noel Harrington: I welcome Mr. Gorman and thank him for a very interesting presentation. Obviously, from his presentation, Mr. Gorman is a very passionate angler. While his qualifications as a school principal are noble, I believe it is his passion for angling that is the reason he was a member and is now the chairman-designate of IFI.

To be chairman-designate of IFI is to hold a very responsible position that goes far beyond the passion for angling. I want to ask a series of questions on how Mr. Gorman sees his potential role as chairman of IFI and how he would gauge IFI's engagement with other statutory agencies that may have a role or may impact on some of the core objectives of IFI, whether that is in co-operation or, perhaps in some cases, in conflict with it. For example, how would he see IFI's position with respect to agencies such as the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority, the Naval Service, the Garda Síochána, the Marine Institute and Fáilte Ireland? Mr. Gorman's presentation highlights the value of the angling tourism sector, both inland and sea angling. How is IFI supported in that respect by Fáilte Ireland and how would Mr. Gorman foresee engagement between IFI and Fáilte Ireland in terms of further developing the tourism potential of angling?

Mr. Gorman made a point about outdated legislation, which would always interest members of this committee and may warrant further correspondence. In terms of funding, there are obviously competing interests within IFI in regard to, for example, stocking, protection and enforcement. Does Mr. Gorman have a position with regard to increasing or decreasing funding? Does he believe IFI would get more bang for its buck by investing in stocking, in light of the British Columbia example, rather than, as he has outlined, spending more resources on protection and enforcement, particularly given the limited financial resources? Where would he see a greater kickback for the angling industry? Is the current level of funding appropriate and would he foresee it changing?

Another issue which is becoming increasingly prevalent and into the debate on which IFI is frequently dragged is river dredging, particularly with respect to the potential for flooding. I do not know when we last had a dredging programme but anecdotal evidence would suggest it was perhaps 50 or 60 years ago. One of the issues that continually arises among local authorities and agencies such as IFI is resistance to such an approach by some agencies that need to carry out river dredging to mitigate the risk of flooding. They are not allowed to do so or they are very restricted in the action they can take. In many cases it is too late. I would welcome if Mr. Gorman had a view on that and how he would stand over it in his position as chair.

A very contentious issue, which I have often spoken about when IFI is before the committee, is the developing aquaculture industry offshore. IFI has clearly made known its position on this

industry in some of the publications I have read. The reality, however, is that, as a committee and as elected Members, some of us must engage in a balancing act with respect to the potential aquaculture provides to coastal communities and also the benefits provided by the angling sector in peripheral areas. We get conflicting information and studies, including from the Marine Institute. When I say conflicting, I mean the studies of IFI and the Marine Institute are not in agreement. As chairman, does Mr. Gorman see a role for greater co-operation or dialogue - or a new dialogue - between the Marine Institute and IFI with respect to coming up with a common position where the interests of both the angling sector and the aquaculture sector would be addressed? In the area in which I live, one company employs approximately 45 people. There is no way those 45 individuals would be employed anywhere else if the aquaculture industry did not exist. I represent them. A licensing regime is in place and I wish to hear how IFI will engage with it. I understand the regime is becoming more robust. I look forward to hearing the opinion of Mr. Gorman in that regard, not just as an angler but in his role as chairman designate of IFI.

Chairman: I thank Deputy Harrington. Many questions have been asked. I remind members that I need to get around to everybody. I urge that the answers be brief. Some questions might need to be followed up subsequently, particularly as we are obliged to vacate the room by 1.15 p.m. We must keep things rolling, as it were.

Mr. Fintan Gorman: I would love to have a debate with the Deputy on aquaculture and to write the book on it. I do not term myself an angler, I have an interest in the area and in angling but I am not a serious angler.

I recognise the limited employment perspective in respect of aquaculture. To be quite honest, I see it as being totally detrimental to game angling - salmon and trout angling - particularly in the context of the cages that are placed in estuaries and riverbeds. I wish to quote from a recent study from the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research, published in the very reputable *Aquaculture Environment Interactions*. The institute studied 300 scientific papers on the problem of sea lice resulting from aquaculture. I will be brief, as the Chairman requested. The conclusion is that at the mouth of spawning rivers, sea lice from aquaculture are responsible for a reduction of between 12% and 29% in the number of salmon returning. My view and that of IFI-----

Deputy Noel Harrington: I am sorry, Chairman, but, with respect, I could again quote the Marine Institute saying something entirely different. That is the problem. We are becoming arbiters of different studies.

Mr. Fintan Gorman: Yes.

Deputy Noel Harrington: It is clear there is a gulf between both. The question I asked was if Mr. Gorman would see himself as chairperson looking to engage with that and seeing if there is common ground.

Mr. Fintan Gorman: Absolutely. Inland Fisheries Ireland would be delighted to engage with BIM and to engage with the Marine Institute because I absolutely believe that we should have a common aim of preserving and enhancing the fisheries. Let me be quite clear that IFI is not opposed to aquaculture. What we do have a problem with is that it needs to be properly regulated and all regulations need to be enforced - to the extent that when salmon and sea trout are going out in the spring, sea lice levels would be at or close to zero at that time of year. There needs to be co-operation so we can all coexist. There has to be a place for all forms of employ-

ment and fishing.

Chairman: Does the committee wish to turn to dredging or flooding?

Deputy Noel Harrington: River dredging.

Mr. Fintan Gorman: River dredging is the business of the Office of Public Works. Inland Fisheries Ireland would be consulted. I do appreciate what the Deputy is saying as I have been around the country and have heard of areas where rivers have been decimated. The IFI has been consulted but when an egg is broken it is not that easy to put it back together. IFI is often sent for in order to pick up the pieces of the broken egg and put it back together. I think that IFI and angling groups and bodies should have a greater input into what is going to be done on the point debated. There is a big demand in areas of the country where flooding is a problem so one has competing interests. Unfortunately, where people have been flooded in recent years the pleadings of IFI in such situations are not top of the list of priorities. It is trying to ameliorate the flooding situation. As politicians, members will realise that when someone's home is being flooded, pleading about fish is not going to get a great hearing.

Deputy Michael Colreavy: Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil leis an gCathaoirleach agus fáilte mhór a chur roimh Mr. Gorman. You are very welcome. I will be unintentionally rude as I have to leave the meeting soon. I wish Mr. Gorman the very best, in advance, in his role as chairperson of Inland Fisheries Ireland. When I was a youngster I used to go around the rivers and lakes of south Leitrim with a fishing rod and a worm and look out for the bailiffs.

I attended a meeting with staff in the IFI offices in Drumsna a few weeks ago. I am aware that the union has campaigned for a restoration of some of the cuts that were made. Normally one looks for things like policies, practices, equipment and statistics. These were very impressive but what bowled me over entirely was the enthusiasm of the staff in the IFI Drumsna office. Seldom have I come across staff who are so enthused about the work they do. A striking example of this was one lad who came in after the meeting had started. He had got a call out. While he was out he had met some German tourists and when they saw him - like when I was a young fella - they probably thought "here's a guy from inland fisheries, we could be in trouble here". He spoke with them. They were doing nothing wrong, they took photographs of him and the IFI banner and they were so surprised that an official from IFI would take the time to talk to tourists. I imagine they will now go and tell their angling friends in Germany about it - a small yet significant contribution to tourism. I did not check their teeth to ascertain their ages, some of them may well be middle-aged or beyond but it certainly impressed me.

I have some points on the presentation and Mr. Gorman's responses to some questions. I fully appreciate that the 32% cut in funds and the reduction in staff from 440 to 298 has limited the scope for improvement.

Mr. Gorman mentioned a couple of times that he pleads repeatedly with the Oireachtas to update the legislation. Has IFI a summary list or is it working with any individuals within the Department to point out where there are inadequacies in the current legislation, what gaps exist and what types of changes are to be made? Has he made any submission on that, because I have not seen it? Would it be possible to get a copy of a submission he has made?

One of the questions I had intended to ask was with regard to permits. Mr. Gorman tells us that the problem with the permits can only be resolved when the legislation changes. Perhaps he would tell me about that.

The second point I wish to raise is that, anecdotally, people will say that fish stocks are way down. However, I understand that is not exactly accurate. Perhaps Mr. Gorman would discuss that, the current position with the fish stocks, what the trends are and whether we are doing enough to spread knowledge about fish stocks and the preservation of our fish stocks.

I have one point of disagreement with Mr. Gorman. I understand that having a single unitary business responsible for water quality should be a good idea in theory. However, I cannot agree that Irish Water, in view of its history, will in any way contribute to the ease of his work. In fact, it will probably exacerbate the pollution problem by throwing very expensive consultant reports along with untreated sewage into the waters, but that is my position in that regard.

I welcome Mr. Gorman and it is good to have Dr. Byrne here as well. He is welcome. I wish them the best. What they do is important in financial terms and also for the feel-good factor in Ireland. Inland fisheries are important. Perhaps Mr. Gorman will deal with the points I raised.

Mr. Fintan Gorman: If we get into a full discussion of Irish Water, we might not be out of the meeting by 1.15 p.m.

Deputy Michael Colreavy: Chairman, if you would like to list it for the next meeting, I would be quite happy to discuss it.

Mr. Fintan Gorman: I would not mind, either, but I doubt that the Chairman would allow it.

In terms of the legislation, the Deputy asked if there was any engagement. Yes, there was. Before I was appointed to the board of IFI, I understand we were on the verge of having fisheries legislation updated. However, a problem arose at the time. I understand that Dr. Byrne was invited to a meeting of the committee and he was invited to discuss legislation with the political parties, but a controversy arose about a small facet of the legislation. I understand the legislation was almost ready to go but the particular facet revolved around a contribution by participants in angling to the funding of the upgrade of the system. It was left in abeyance after that and it has not been raised since. I am not really familiar with it but I will ask Dr. Byrne to provide the Deputy with the details of the position with that at the time.

The other question the Deputy asked was about employment. If we get more employees, of course we can do more protection, more development and, hopefully, raise the profile of the organisation. That is without doubt. We would hope that it would be productively used. I will convey the Deputy's compliments to the staff----

Deputy Michael Colreavy: Please do.

Mr. Fintan Gorman: -----for the positive way they engage. Nothing beats human interaction. No amount of computer interaction, machinery or anything else can beat having people. Soldiers on the ground is the best way to impress and to provide any service.

However, I can again offer a snippet on how that can be improved. I said that any investment we would get would be used wisely. If we get extra staff and if we got new, improved legislation, we could have a new situation. We spend a great deal of our time on one prosecution. The amount of paperwork involved and trying to get it processed and get it through takes up an inordinate amount of time. If we had investment in IT, we could create a platform where that could be dealt with. We could create an IT format for dealing with reports for the OPW on flooding and similar issues. The format could be available there rather than people having to

start from the ground each time. The potential exists therefore for some investment in IT and an increase in staff in order to radically improve the output, performance and productivity of the organisation.

Chairman: We have four more members indicating they wish to contribute. We will take questions from Deputies O'Donovan and Fitzmaurice first and then from Deputy Fleming and Senator Brennan.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: I wish Mr. Gorman well. His credentials speak for themselves and I have no doubt he will make an excellent chairman of Inland Fisheries Ireland.

I have a number of questions, but I am sure the chairman designate has been briefed by the CEO, Dr. Byrne, in regard to some of the concerns I raised previously with IFI. I welcome the chairman designate's assertion that the levels of employment within the organisation are unsustainably low. I know from meeting employees in the Limerick region recently that they are concerned about this, particularly in regard to part-time staff who are taken on for six months and then laid off for six months. These staff do an excellent job and I would like to see some progress made on this issue and welcome Mr. Gorman's comment on it.

I know a change has been suggested in regard to fish counts and how data will be published and it is expected the 2015 data will not now be made available until April 2016. This creates a bit of a problem for people concerned about stocking levels in rivers. Mr. Gorman made a passionate assertion in regard to stocking levels and mentioned that in order to have a viable angling industry, we needed to have fish. I have cited a case umpteen times to the IFI. I have no axe to grind in this regard. I am not an angler and know nothing about how to catch fish. All I know is how to eat them and I find them good. However, if we look at the statistics in regard to a river I am *au fait* with, the River Feale, which rises in County Cork, forms a boundary between Limerick and Kerry and flows into the sea at Ballybunion, it is obvious the IFI has information available indicating stocking levels are on a downward trajectory.

I know the response Mr. Gorman will give me on this - that there is a healthy level of fish within the River Feale. However, let us look at the River Feale and at other rivers across the country. In Mr. Gorman's area we have the River Moy. Intervention has brought that river to the state it is in today where it is making a massive contribution to the local economy. It cost significant money to make that intervention, but it was worthwhile paying it and it has paid a dividend to the local economy. I was in the Chairman's part of the country over the summer and every second town and village had a fishing tackle shop, demonstrating the contribution the industry is making in the west of Ireland. There is no reason the industry cannot make that kind of contribution in other parts of the country, but we need somebody to speak out honestly in regard to what is happening with our rivers.

At a time when there were no sewage treatment works, no regulations on agricultural effluent and lime used as fertiliser all over the country, we had more fish in the River Feale than we have now. Perhaps Mr. Gorman can explain this to me. I do not want to hear about El Niño, changes in the north Atlantic drift, weather patterns or what is happening off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland or any of that. I just want to know why, when Limerick, Kerry and Cork county councils are making improvements to sewage treatment works, when farmers operate under strict restrictions in terms of protecting rivers, when anglers are taking massive hits in regard to what they can catch and are very conscious of their role as custodians of the rivers, fish numbers are reducing. Perhaps Mr. Gorman can cast some light on that.

In response to Deputy Harrington, Mr. Gorman mentioned flooding. When the village of Athea in County Limerick, which is on the River Gale, a tributary of the River Feale, flooded in 2008, Limerick County Council arrived in to remove what can only be described as industrial-type debris from under the bridge, which had been blocked for years because the channel is not maintained by anybody. The OPW does not maintain it because it is not an OPW channel. The fisheries people arrived then and wanted the debris returned to the river. That is the kind of public relations farce - fiasco - that occurs when it comes to people's property being flooded. In the hierarchy of things, river gravel is treated as being more important.

What is the IFI going to do about inland fisheries? Does Mr. Gorman think it is the responsibility of the wrong Department? Does he think responsibility for the marine lies with the wrong Department? I know nothing about how to catch fish but one Department deals with salmon in the Atlantic, while another deals with what happens in the mouth of the River Shannon. One Government agency deals with the same fish in the Atlantic, while another deals with those around Mount Collins. It is absolutely bizarre to have two competing Departments with two totally different agendas and two competing Government agencies with two totally different agendas. Throw in the local authorities on top of this, as well as Irish Water, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Office of Public Works and local representatives with their own axe to grind.

Chairman: Cork, Limerick and Kerry are a lethal cocktail also.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: They would not agree on what day of the week it was, any more than they would in Mayo and Galway, but I am sure the Chairman will sort out that problem. Add all of these competing interests together and what are forgotten are the fish, the marine and life on the river. It is amazing that there are fish in rivers, given the number of interests involved. Every single one of them has a statutory interest and they are all competing against each other. As Deputy Noel Harrington said, they would not agree on what day of the week it was, but while that is happening, stock numbers are falling through the floor. As in the Feale, the Deel and other rivers in County Limerick, the fish will be wiped out and there will be nothing left. All the next generation will have is Béaloideas - their grandfather's recollection of what it was to stand on the bank of the River Feale with a rod.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: The first things I noted were the functions of IFI, namely, to promote, support, facilitate and advise the Minister on the conservation, protection, management, marketing, development and improvement of inland fisheries. Can Mr. Gorman give me a straight answer? In Lanesborough there is Asian clam. In Shannonbridge and Carrick-on-Shannon there is the same problem. There are some in the River Barrow also. People are angered and frustrated around the country when they go to Inland Fisheries Ireland about a problem, only to be told that it is the National Parks and Wildlife Service that deals with it. They go around in circles. If an invasive species was found in any river in the country, would IFI be responsible? Would the National Parks and Wildlife Service be responsible? I want a statement on who would be responsible. On conservation and protection, the effort made by IFI and the National Parks and Wildlife Service is the most pathetic I have ever seen made in my life. There were supposed to be reports on what was happening, but they were delayed, although I believe they may be out now.

Around the country, during the years, we brought thousands and thousands of English anglers here. At a time when the sterling exchange rate is very positive for a person coming here from England, we have not marketed our product, rivers and country. In Rooskey, compared to the number who came at one time, the place is dead. If one moves right along the River Shan-

non or any of the rivers by its side, the story is the same. We talk about flooding, but when there is a problem such as a blockage, everyone says what cannot be done, but there is nobody there to say what actually can be done to solve the problem. We are all great at saying one cannot touch that as it might affect something but it is all right if the farmer's animals drown. Someone must step up to the mark and take responsibility.

Do administrative staff in Inland Fisheries Ireland's depots have vehicles supplied to them or is it just staff examining rivers? I have seen some of the vehicles used by the agency in the west. If one were trying to catch a poacher in one of them, one would not be going too far. I note from photos of vehicles parked at the agency's main offices that they are mainly four-wheel drives.

There was a strategy to remove pike from inland fisheries as the main concentration was on trout and salmon. If one examines good practice in other European countries, such a policy has been abandoned because the statistics did not stack up in favour of such action. Will there be a change in policy in that regard?

Chairman: Today's meeting is about the suitability of the chair designate for the post. We can invite officials to come before us at a later date to deal with specific questions such as those just raised.

Mr. Fintan Gorman: I will refer the specific question on vehicles to the chief executive officer because that is a management matter. As chairman of the board, it would be inappropriate for me to get involved in management. Management is paid to manage. From my experience, it is doing the job well but it is up to it to answer specific questions of that nature on vehicles.

The strategy on pike will be reviewed in two or three years' time. The agreement is that after checking the scientific advice and consulting widely with anglers and other affected groups, there will continue to be a pike cull in the wild brown trout lakes, of which there are 12, located mainly in the west. Until that policy is reviewed, it will continue.

As I said in my opening statement, we need specific and definite legislation on invasive species. Until such time as legislation outlining which group is responsible is produced, there will be recurrences of the situation relating to Asian clam as outlined by the Deputy.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: Who is responsible? I am asking a straight question.

Mr. Fintan Gorman: The only group that has been given a designation by legislation in this is the National Biodiversity Data Centre. Perhaps it is that group; perhaps it is the Office of Public Works, OPW, or the National Parks and Wildlife Service, NPWS.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: Will Mr. Gorman agree that, under EU law, the NPWS is responsible for dealing with invasive species?

Mr. Fintan Gorman: I would think there would be a logic in imposing that.

In fisheries, ten years ago *lagarosiphon major* appeared in the Corrib. As the Deputy said, everyone kicked the ball around - pass the parcel was played. Eventually, Inland Fisheries Ireland was left holding that baby. We are still cutting *lagarosiphon major* in the lake at a cost of between €400,000 and €450,000 a year. We are only containing it and will never win against it. Inland Fisheries Ireland has not been provided with any designated funding for this. After that experience, I would contend that the NPWS should have taken on that responsibility rather than

Inland Fisheries Ireland being left holding the baby. We will be reluctant to do take a similar approach on the next occasion.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: Would it not be a good idea that Inland Fisheries Ireland, Waterways Ireland and the NPWS go to the relevant Department and seek funding in such cases? There is €13 million all the way up from the river Shannon in Limerick at stake and nothing is being done apart from everyone passing the buck. Who will stand up sooner or later and say, "It is our problem"?

Mr. Fintan Gorman: It would be a very good idea but it would be an even better idea if the Legislature clearly defined whose problem it is.

Chairman: I think we have taken that issue as far we can.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: Could I get a reply to my question?

Chairman: Which one? Is it the question about the flooding at Athea?

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: I spoke about flooding and about the mish-mash of agencies. I also asked at what stage in a downward trajectory in fish levels does conservation kick in.

Mr. Fintan Gorman: I agree with the Deputy about the declining level of salmon because the figures speak for themselves. The 2014 catch of salmon was 36% lower than the 2013 catch and 2013 showed a decrease on the previous year. The graph is going down.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: Is that in the Feale or nationally?

Mr. Fintan Gorman: That is a national figure. When the figures for the Feale are examined at micro level it is one of the better rivers. It is not closed to angling because the standing scientific committee work out on the basis of counter-data that the Feale exceeds its conservation level, therefore so much fish are available for exploitation. It is above that level and they are allowed to catch a certain number of fish in the Feale. I cannot answer the question on the counter-data, that is a management matter and I suggest the Deputy refer it to management.

I agree with the Deputy that the graph is down and that there is quite a danger in the next generation that we will have béaloideas, a distant memory of when it used to be a good fishery, if we do not take serious steps to change many things. I agree with the Deputy on that. Many would say, which is very controversial but I will kick the ball into the pitch, if we want to maintain these rivers long term we must go to hatcheries.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: Does Mr. Gorman agree with me that there should be a single Department dealing with fishing and a single agency dealing with fish?

Mr. Fintan Gorman: I see the absolute logic in that. We are responsible, as I understand it, for inshore fisheries going out for a few miles and after that the Sea Fisheries Protection Agency takes over. At least in a field there is a boundary but it is senseless out at sea, to mark where one begins and the other ends. Many of the things we do are senseless. There should be a rationalisation of how all these services are provided. We can only work, unfortunately, within the legislation and the regulations. Much of that is very prescriptive and very wasteful.

Deputy Patrick O'Donovan: It is refreshing to hear that level of honesty about the agency structure and for a chairman designate to agree with us about the structural deficit. I would not say it if I did not believe it. Mr. Gorman's honesty about the fiasco we have at the moment is

refreshing.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: Does Mr. Gorman think the drop in the number of people coming here angling is a bad chart? Have the fisheries bodies failed?

Mr. Fintan Gorman: The Deputy is absolutely right, the numbers have declined dramatically, as the figures show. The quality of the fishing available to them has declined. I suppose all the plethora of agencies that Deputy O'Donovan referred to have to take responsibility for that. As a nation we have not protected, developed and invested in that great asset that could provide a livelihood in rural depopulated areas, places where companies such as Intel and IBM will never come to employ anyone. If the asset of angling tourism was invested in, nurtured and developed it would provide sustainable jobs. It is the only thing, along with agriculture, that will provide the jobs.

Deputy Tom Fleming: I also welcome the chairman designate of IFI. Does IFI co-operate and liaise with Fáilte Ireland? Mr. Gorman mentioned the depletion of stocks, of which I am very well aware in my own county of Kerry, as is Deputy Patrick O'Donovan in his area. Stock rates are falling dramatically in the Feale, Laune, Maine and Flesk rivers, among others. In the adjoining county of Cork there are reservations about stock depletion in the River Blackwater, a renowned salmon fishing river. Are regular audits carried out to monitor the position?

My next point is on amenity areas, in particular, angling facilities for disabled people. I reiterate what has been said about progression of the building and development of fishing tourism. We should look very much at what is happening in Mr. Gorman's and the Chairman's county, but we should also look at the model in Scotland where amenities on rivers are very well structured and developed to attract tourists and there is a huge tourism industry.

How much liaison is there with Irish Water? It is shameful to see raw sewage entering rivers. In this day and age, it is not acceptable and the problem needs to be worked on immediately. I ask for the appropriate treatment plants to be provided. I am sure that, through PPPs and other means, Irish Water, with local councils, would be able to install them as a matter of urgency.

Senator Terry Brennan: I wish Mr. Gorman well in his new role.

On my colleague's last point, it is sad to think that in 2015 we still have 42 towns in which effluent is being discharged into harbours, the sea and rivers. Forty years ago, when English and Scottish angling tourists came to my home town of Carlingford and stayed for one week to fish the lakes of counties Monaghan and Cavan, the benefit to the local economy was enormous. This has not happened for the past 30 years and I would love to see it happening again. While I do not know why it is not happening, there is a major opportunity to attract angling tourists from England and continental Europe. Mr. Gorman might comment on this. What should he do in order that, following his tenure, he will be able to say he achieved his aims?

Mr. Fintan Gorman: I have outlined the national strategy for angling development. For the small sum of €25 million over four or five years, we can get multiples in return. Where I come from, Cong, the situation was the same as that mentioned by Senator Terry Brennan. It was populated mostly by British anglers who were high spenders and sustained jobs in the area.

We co-operate with Fáilte Ireland in the marketing of the tourism product. However, to be honest, it recognises that just 2% of visitors to the country are anglers. The big focus is on the Wild Atlantic Way. If something is located along the corridor of the Wild Atlantic Way, it is promotable because it will yield a result. Anything else is not quite as high on Fáilte Ireland's

list of priorities.

Chairman: Deputy Tom Fleming had other questions to ask.

Deputy Tom Fleming: Mr. Gorman has answered my question about Fáilte Ireland. I also asked whether IFI was working positively in association with Irish Water on the issue of sewage treatment facilities.

Mr. Fintan Gorman: I understand that the CEO has interacted - I do not know how regularly - with Irish Water. As I said, in spite of it not being politically correct to say so, we see it as a positive development. Rather than interacting with the disparate views of several county councils and local authorities, there is now one body that can, I hope, be held responsible for the dreadful situation to which the Senator referred, the 42 towns in which sewage is being discharged into harbours.

This is going to be the responsible body. Again, as with fisheries, if we want a result, we will have to be prepared to put our hand in our pocket. If we starve it of resources, we cannot expect it to deliver its remit. Where I come from, a rural area, we have no problem. Water is viewed in a different way. If I pollute Lough Mask, the water coming out of my tap is polluted. I see a direct correlation between the quality of the water out there and what I am using.

Chairman: I apologise for rushing this but we are under a time constraint. I thank Mr. Gorman for coming before us today and engaging with us in a very refreshing and upfront way. A number of questions were raised on issues concerning the management and if the CEO could come back to us through the clerk, we can disseminate the answers. I propose to forward the transcript of today's discussion to the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources for information and consideration. I wish Mr. Gorman well in his new post.

The joint committee adjourned at 1.15 p.m. until 10.45 a.m. on Wednesday, 30 September 2015.