

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM IOMPAR, TURASÓIREACHT AGUS SPÓRT

JOINT COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT, TOURISM AND SPORT

Dé Céadaoin, 12 Iúil 2017

Wednesday, 12 July 2017

Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 9 a.m.

The Joint Committee met at 9 a.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	Seanadóirí / Senators
Mick Barry,	Frank Feighan,
Imelda Munster,	John O'Mahony,
Catherine Murphy,	Ned O'Sullivan,
Kevin O'Keeffe,	Pádraig Ó Céidigh.
Robert Troy.	

I láthair / In attendance: Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice.

Teachta / Deputy Fergus O'Dowd sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

Business of Joint Committee

Chairman: I am delighted to be here and I hope to be able to work with everybody. No apologies have been received. I remind Members to turn off their mobile phones or switch them to silent mode. I propose that we go into private session to deal with some housekeeping matters. Is that agreed? Agreed.

The joint committee went into private session at 9.05 a.m. and resumed in public session at 10 a.m.

Rugby World Cup 2023: Discussion

Chairman: I remind members, witnesses and persons in the Gallery to make sure their mobile phones are turned off.

The purpose of this meeting is to discuss Ireland's bid to host the Rugby World Cup in 2023. The Bill passed all Stages in the House last night and enjoyed cross-party support, which is welcome. There is an urgency to the legislation, as communicated to us by the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. The legislation had to be passed by a specific date so pre-legislative scrutiny did not take place, by consent. The Minister, Deputy Shane Ross, is very welcome.

By virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the committee. However, if they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and they continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person or an entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable.

Members are reminded of the long-standing 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 the Minister, Deputy Ross, to make his opening statement.

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross): I congratulate the Chairman on his appointment. I look forward to working with him and the committee in the months and, hopefully, years ahead. I thank the committee for handing me on a Minister of State who has been in a very good training ground here for the past year.

As the Chairman said, the Bill passed all Stages in the Seanad last night. I am grateful to the committee for allowing it to pass without pre-legislative scrutiny and, therefore, enabling it to reach the President in time for an early signature. I also thank the committee for the all-party nature of the support the Bill has had throughout its passage. This does not mean it has not had a great degree of examination and, indeed, criticism in quarters, which is very welcome. Generally the enthusiasm for the project has been cross-party and is very welcome.

As the committee knows, Ireland is bidding to host the Rugby World Cup in 2023, and has

so far completed two of three phases, the applicant phase and the candidate phase, and is now in the evaluation phase. The Rugby World Cup is one of the largest global sporting events after the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup. It is held every four years, with the next tournament to be played in Japan in 2019. It has grown substantially since its inauguration in 1987, and is expected to continue to grow in the future.

A successful bid for the Rugby World Cup would be a wonderful opportunity to promote tourism. There would be very considerable tourism potential as it would take place during Ireland's shoulder season for overseas tourism, between mid-September and late October. It is estimated that the tournament would draw approximately 450,000 visitors, who would spend approximately €760 million. Based on Fáilte Ireland estimates, this would provide a return to the Exchequer of €138 million.

There would be many other benefits to the country, not least the profile received through television coverage of the tournament across the world and the exposure the country would get through the thousands of visiting media. In terms of community involvement, the event has the potential to involve thousands of volunteers, building volunteering capacity for future events. A parallel programme of festivals and cultural events would make the most of the opportunity to extend visits and enhance the image of Ireland. There would also be extensive business networking and other business opportunities. In addition, hosting a Rugby World Cup on the island of Ireland would provide a great cultural experience for communities all over the country, with the opportunity to host teams from places as diverse as Tonga, Georgia, Japan, New Zealand and Argentina.

The tournament would also be a great platform for the promotion of sport and physical activity, vital to the physical and mental health of the nation. By its nature, a successful joint tournament would depend upon mutual co-operation between North and South, between now and 2023, to deliver this major project. Hosting the Rugby World Cup in 2023 has the potential to send a powerful message of co-operation across the island to a global audience.

As part of the bidding process, Rugby World Cup Limited is seeking the support of the Government to stage the tournament in 2023, including a number of guarantees and underwrites, which have to be submitted in final signed form by 31 July. These are guarantee of the payment of the tournament fee, underwriting the tournament budget and an undertaking in regard to the support of public services for the tournament. Templates of these draft guarantees were issued by Rugby World Cup Limited on 7 April this year. The State, with the support of NewERA, is discussing these drafts with Rugby World Cup Limited and final versions are due to be agreed and signed by 31 July. Separately the Government has decided to underwrite any bid for commercial rights.

As committee members know, the Bill went through the Dáil last Thursday and was in the Seanad last night, where it passed all Stages. The purpose of the Bill is to enable the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to provide the guarantees and undertakings as part of the bid and, if the bid is successful, to enable the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to support the staging of the tournament.

I regret that the legislation came to the Oireachtas so late. At an earlier stage of planning for Rugby World Cup 2023, the preliminary legal advice was that legislation was not likely to be required in respect of the State's contribution to a company that might be established in relation to hosting Rugby World Cup 2023. However, after further examination, the Office of the Attorney General advised in early May that express statutory authority through the passing

of primary legislation is necessary for a Minister to provide capital support to a tournament company and to provide the necessary guarantees and underwrites to Rugby World Cup Limited. This is based on the judgment of the Attorney General that there is no specific statutory power for the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to expend money or give guarantees directly on a unique major sporting event such as the Rugby World Cup 2023. Therefore, for the avoidance of doubt, the advice is that express statutory authority is required. This authority must be in place before the Minister signs the guarantees. This means the Bill has to become law before 31 July.

As the members of the committee know, we are in an international bidding competition with France and South Africa. All bids submitted are confidential, including the budgets proposed. Given that we are in this position I am, unfortunately, not able to share every detail of the bid with the committee. That said, I want to outline the key asks of Government. Payment of the tournament fee, which is £120 million, with 5% on award and the remainder after the tournament, would be shared with Northern Ireland, and the total cost would be net of receipt of the projected surplus from the tournament company. Separately, the operational side of the tournament, including the projected investment in stadia, would be funded by ticket revenue. This would start to come on stream in 2022, and in the preceding years the tournament company would be funded by commercial loan. In the event there are cashflow challenges that cannot be met from this arrangement, the Minister could loan funds to the company. As I said, this is for cashflow purposes and does not change the financial outcome of the company. These funds would be repaid to Government.

As I mentioned, the Governments of the bidding countries have been asked to underwrite the proposed tournament operational budget. This underwrite would only be called upon if the ticket revenue did not cover the tournament costs, and then only for that element not covered by the ticket revenue. The entire cost would only be become liable if the tournament went ahead with zero revenue. The current projection is that the tournament will make a substantial surplus. The exact budget figure Ireland has submitted is commercially sensitive, but I can tell the committee that Rugby World Cup Limited has provided bidders with an indicative budget of £200 million and the Irish bid is in the region of that figure. This budget includes the cost of operating the tournament and stadia upgrades.

The Government's proposed underwrite would also be supported by Northern Ireland and is capped at the level of the bid budget. The committee may also be interested to know that cancellation insurance is also taken out by the tournament company. Rugby World Cup Limited, like all international sporting bodies, also needs to know that the wider environment, such as infrastructure, legal context and security provision, will be sufficient to host the tournament on the island of Ireland. Accordingly, it has sought undertakings from the Governments that the island has the necessary requirements in place.

Separately, Rugby World Cup Limited has made a number of tournament commercial rights on offer to bidders, which are travel and hospitality, licensing and selected sponsorship categories. Broadcasting rights are not on offer. It is open to the bidders to submit a bid to acquire the rights they believe would provide the best return. A bidding process is taking place and Ireland may acquire some of these rights.

Working closely with our colleagues in the Northern Ireland Executive, the Government has been examining the case for hosting for over four years now. The initial feasibility study was carried out by Deloitte in 2013 and was examined by Departments and agencies, North and South. A cross-Border working group spent six months in 2014 considering that study and the

experience of recent world cups in France and New Zealand, identifying additional costs and risks, and conducting sensitivity analyses. That report produced a revised and more conservative estimate of the impact of hosting but, taking all factors into account, it found it would still be a very positive experience for this island. After consideration of that report, the Government decided to support the bid in December 2014.

After work by the Irish Rugby Football Union, IRFU, external expertise and Government Departments and agencies, the Government again reviewed the project and approved the submission of the applicant phase bid in August 2016. All figures had been re-examined and updated, including a re-assessment of stadia investment requirements, and also took into account the evaluation of the impact of the Rugby World Cup in England in 2015. Since November of last year, the candidate phase bid has been put together. The formal bid to host the Rugby World Cup was submitted on 1 June 2017. The candidate phase itself was very intensive and, again, all aspects of the bid were re-examined and the financial model updated. These figures were submitted to and considered by Government in May and it approved the bid. This examination has involved internal and external expertise, taking into account the impact of Rugby World Cups in other countries and has been considered by Government on three separate occasions.

Hosting the Rugby World Cup in 2023 is a unique opportunity for Ireland. It would be of great benefit to the country, from profile, tourism, sporting, and community perspectives and this Bill enables the Government to fully support it. It is because the bid has been examined now for an extended time period that we are confident of the case for hosting and of the strength of the bid. I am happy to take any questions members of the committee might have. I hope the committee is aware that I amended the Bill in the Dáil to ensure that any subsequent Ministers and I, while I am here, would report to this committee every six months. That was in response to an amendment proposed by Deputy Imelda Munster. I will, as long as I am here, be reporting to the committee on progress every six months, particularly on the financial situation.

Chairman: I thank the Minister for his address. I will clarify one issue initially, if I may. I had understood that the Minister would be here until 11 a.m., but he informed me that he may have to go at 10 a.m. Notwithstanding the normal process that we have here, if we go to the full 15 minutes or the group times, the Minister will not be able to answer questions. If it is possible to do it this way - and this is in the committee's hands - every member could take five minutes, and be taken in groups of three. If we are not finished, I ask the Minister to wait until everybody has spoken. It would split his time and he would leave at 10 a.m., but everybody would get an equal opportunity.

Deputy Shane Ross: I will answer everyone's questions, whether in written form or such.

Chairman: We can come back later on if necessary. If that is fair, we can do it like that.

Deputy Mick Barry: If we do it on the basis of five minutes per member and we start with the bigger parties, that is going to eat up all the time.

Chairman: I do not want to do that.

Deputy Mick Barry: The smaller parties will be excluded. We need to find a fairer way to handle it.

Chairman: I am happy to get a fair way.

Senator Frank Feighan: Seven fives are 35 and that brings us up to 10 a.m.

Chairman: Everybody gets the same and nobody has individual advantage. I think that is fair.

Deputy Mick Barry: There are seven people in the room, who will get five minutes each.

Chairman: Yes, that is what I want to do. I will take questions in groups of three if that is okay, and the Minister is happy that we have finished our process at this stage. I call Senator Frank Feighan.

Senator Frank Feighan: The Minister is very welcome. I congratulate Deputy O'Dowd on his appointment as Chairman of this committee.

This is huge for the island of Ireland. I was chair of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. At our plenary in Dublin two years ago, we visited the Garden of Remembrance and Croke Park. The British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly comprises members of the House of Commons, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly and several other jurisdictions along with our own Seanad and Dáil. We proposed that the Rugby World Cup would be located on the island of Ireland. It was agreed unanimously by all members. We wrote to the Taoiseach at the time. I like to believe that was very powerful, and everything helps. I congratulate the Minister on moving this forward. I do not think people fully realise how significant this is, not just for the Republic, but for the island of Ireland. 2023 will be an amazing feat and an incredible amount of work has to be done.

I have a question on one issue which I have been closely involved with. We talked about having the Olympics in this country as well. There is an opportunity, as far as I am aware. The Commonwealth Games were supposed to be in Durban in South Africa in 2022. That has been cancelled and I believe there is a golden opportunity now for the island of Ireland, with the Northern Ireland Executive, to locate the Commonwealth Games in Belfast. As an island, on an all-Ireland basis, we could use all our facilities to accommodate that. I understand that, in the next few months, a decision will be made in the United Kingdom. Maybe the Commonwealth Games will be located in Manchester or Liverpool or such, but I believe this is a wonderful opportunity for the Northern Ireland Executive or Ms Arlene Foster and others to try to locate the games in Belfast. The island of Ireland could work together to host the Commonwealth Games. I say this because that is in 2022. I think it would be a wonderful opportunity, and the Commonwealth Games are probably bigger than the Rugby World Cup. I ask the Minister to use his offices to liaise with the Northern Ireland Executive to try to locate the Commonwealth Games on the island of Ireland in 2022. We are a strong Republic, but that would be a great way, especially with what is happening today in Northern Ireland, to unite the island of Ireland, which the Rugby World Cup will absolutely do. I think there is another opportunity in 2022. We have facilities here in Croke Park, we have Loch Rynn in Leitrim where there is rowing, and I think it would be a wonderful opportunity.

Senator John O'Mahony: I was in the Seanad yesterday evening and I think the Minister gave all the explanations I asked for there. I wish him well. I think he has all the angles covered. As has been stated so many times, it is a huge opportunity, and I think that it is vital that we win this and that we showcase Ireland to the rest of the world. Money could not buy the exposure that we would get during the tournament. I have another question on another matter. Is the decision being made in September of this year?

Deputy Shane Ross: It is in November. A presentation is being made in September, but the actual decision is in early November.

Senator John O'Mahony: Early November. We all very much await that and hope that the news will be good then.

We have a note here about a serious matter, the inquiry that the Minister set up after the Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games last year and the Moran report. I accept the explanation here that the Minister cannot publish it yet or that he has not read it, as has been said here, and that he has got legal advice from Brazil, which is with the Attorney General at present. Will the Minister give an indication of the status of that? This is something that I brought up at this committee back when this was set up initially. I felt that this was going to run into the sand because of all the legal impediments that had been put up. I fully understand that has to be done. I understand from the notes here that the Minister is meeting with the Attorney General this week about that report and the possible publication of it. Will the Minister give us an update on that?

Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe: I welcome the Minister. One respects the competence of the IRFU in making this bid and we wish it every success. We are here to ask a few questions and I thank the Minister for coming before us at short notice. Even this bidding process is creating a feel good factor for the country and the economy and one or two media pundits are speculating on how it got through so quickly. How much assistance did the Cabinet receive? When was the former Attorney General first requested to brief the Department on the need for the legislation which was passed last night? I am not questioning the process, but there is a perception in the media as to why the Bill was left so late when the process was ongoing for four years. It is nearly 12 months since the Government gave a letter of comfort in support of the bid. Why, therefore, was the former Attorney General so slow in coming back with a second opinion? I will put up my hand. I was probably one of the first to attack the Minister for rushing the legislation, but he told us in good faith last Wednesday that the former Attorney General had come back to tell him that he needed legislation. Why did she change her mind, thus requiring this legislation to be brought before us? That is what is causing mayhem among the public. If it was any other legislation required to hold some other event, it would be making the headlines in of all the newspapers, but the fact is that it is creating a feel good factor in the country, which is welcome.

The Minister has mentioned that the broadcasting rights would be outside his control. I thought he gave an indication last Wednesday in the Dáil that some matches would be broadcast free-to-air. Will he clarify the matter?

Deputy Shane Ross: On the Commonwealth Games, an issue addressed by Senator Frank Feighan, it is a new idea to me. I have never considered it. Is the Senator talking about the 2022 games?

Senator Frank Feighan: Absolutely.

Deputy Shane Ross: I do not want to dismiss the idea and will certainly ask my officials to consider it to see what the prospects would be.

Deputy Mick Barry: Would Ireland have to rejoin the Commonwealth?

Deputy Shane Ross: Probably not because the Executive in Belfast would do it for us.

Senator Frank Feighan: To clarify, the Conservative manifesto clarified that the British Government would fund the hosting of the Commonwealth Games in the United Kingdom. It would be a perfect and wonderful opportunity to host them in Belfast, given that we are talking about cross-Border and all-island relations. Ireland would not rejoin the Commonwealth, but

it would involve an association with the Commonwealth. Let us remember that Ireland was an active member of the Commonwealth until 1949 when it was a Fine Gael Taoiseach, John A. Costello, who took us out of it.

Chairman: I respect the importance of the question, but can we let the Minister answer without interruption? In saying that I am not being rude to the Senator.

Deputy Shane Ross: Let us look at it. I do not have a clue whether it would be a good idea or how feasible it would be. I presume it would be up to the Executive in Belfast to make the bid, but let us explore the idea. I see no reason we should not do so.

Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe: Do not rush it through.

Deputy Shane Ross: The Deputy would not let me do so, but I thank Senators John O’Mahony and Frank Feighan for their huge enthusiasm and energy which I share.

I am not here to answer the question about the Moran report, but I will try. The report which I have not seen is with the Attorney General. It was delivered to my office and without seeing it I decided to send it to the Attorney General. Therefore, I have not read it. I sent it to the Attorney General asking how it could be published. In other words, its content has legal implications for various parties. I have asked the Attorney General to come back with the best advice on how it can be published and out in the open. That is where the matter stands. I think my officials were briefed on it yesterday or the day before. I have not yet spoken to them about it. I was going to speak to them last night, but I had to take this Bill in the Seanad. I will, therefore, speak to them today about it. It is imminent. It involves some tooing and frowning with the Office of the Attorney General, but it has reached the stage where it is advising on what the implications in Brazil will be in respect of certain things, about which I do not really want to talk, but we are looking at the report with a view to its publication, which is the objective. I will probably have more news on the matter either today or tomorrow.

Deputy John O’Mahony: As we are approaching the end of the session, there might not be an opportunity to discuss it here until September.

Deputy Shane Ross: I know, but I could not time everything. I can, however, certainly come back to the committee.

Senator John O’Mahony: I was suggesting that if a decision was made, we meet to discuss it next week.

Chairman: I assure every member of the committee that I will contact him or her directly if and when the report is received with a view to having an urgent and immediate meeting with the Minister and his officials, if that would be the appropriate outcome.

Deputy Shane Ross: I am not sure what the response will be - whether we will have any real news or whether there will be more legal tooing and frowning. I hope not, but if we have any news, I will be quite happy to come and talk to the committee about it and outline what the implications are.

Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe’s question concerned the legal advice and why it was received so late. We received preliminary legal advice from the Office of the Attorney General on 1 February that it was likely that legislation would not be required to allow the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to contribute to a new company limited by guarantee, subject to policy con-

siderations in terms of corporate governance that would merit the introduction of legislation to govern this unique transaction. On 3 April, as the bidding documents and draft agreements were being developed, further clarification was sought from the Attorney General and on 7 April the draft guarantees required by World Rugby were received. We had no control over that deadline, but as soon as they were received, further advice was sought. On 4 May legal advice was received from the Office of the Attorney General that express statutory authority was necessary. That was the first time we had received that advice. At no stage prior to the receipt of that advice could it have been assumed that legislation would be required. Although there were indications as to the likely form the guarantees required would take, the actual drafts were not received from Rugby World Cup until 7 April. The legislation has since been prepared and thoroughly examined by the Office of the Attorney General and departmental officials.

The Deputy spoke about broadcasting rights. I said in the Dáil and the Seanad that they were owned by World Rugby but that under the Act all of Ireland's matches would be available free-to-air.

Deputy Robert Troy: I thank the Minister for coming before the committee. While it is a welcome opportunity, we discussed the matter at length for four hours last week in the Dáil. I do not know, therefore, whether the Minister can bring anything new to the debate. It is worth noting that the opportunity to host one of the world's major sports events and showcase Ireland on the world stage as an all-island nation to a potential viewership of in excess of 800 million would be hugely positive. Who would be responsible for providing the budget for running the tournament, including stadia upgrades, security and the provision of broadband, to ensure everything would be up to speed? On my way here this morning I saw a poster according to which the Minister was calling a public meeting to have a swimming pool reopened in his constituency. I would certainly have concerns-----

Deputy Mick Barry: Is it beside the Garda station?

Deputy Robert Troy: Who is running the bid to host the Rugby World Cup?

If the Minister is having difficulty opening a swimming pool in his constituency, it gives me little confidence in his ability to push on this bid.

In terms of this being an all-Ireland bid, in the event that parties in the North do not form an Executive, will the Republic be left with the full 100% liability or will there be an opportunity for parties in Northern Ireland to get involved in that?

In last week's Dáil debate on the Bill, the Minister said that the primary funding of the event will come from ticket sales. When pushed on ticket pricing by several Members, he said that they will be significantly lower than was the case for the 2015 Rugby World Cup in England. Tickets in 2015 were priced at up to £300 and the average price over the full tournament was quite high. What confirmation has the Minister had that prices will be significantly lower and what will prices be? How can he be sure of ticket prices six years in advance of a tournament to take place in 2023?

I support what Senator O'Mahony said about the Rio ticketing fiasco. If we are to wait until September to debate that issue, it will have been 12 months from the incident occurring. The inquiry was set up to report within 12 weeks. It will have been 12 months. What is the difference between now and when it was set up? An investigation was ongoing in Rio when it was set up. This committee was assured that every party was going to participate fully, openly

and transparently with the committee and there was, therefore, no need for a statutory inquiry. Who is now preventing the publication of the inquiry report? Some of those the Department felt were going to participate openly and transparently are now preventing its publication and preventing Members, as elected representatives, from debating its conclusions.

Deputy Imelda Munster: During the Dáil debate on the Bill, the Minister gave Members all the information he said he had available, given that the hypothetical situation of an event that may or may not take place in six years' time was being discussed, and that was fair enough. He has given the reasons for the rushed legislation. I again put it on the record that the last-minute approach taken is not an acceptable way to legislate, in particular for an event of this magnitude.

I have a couple of questions regarding issues on which I am not 100% clear. Although the Minister is very welcome to the committee, a request was made for the IRFU to attend, not the Minister, to see if any more information could be prised from it.

Chairman: To be fair to the Minister, the clerk informs me-----

Deputy Imelda Munster: I know that but I am just making that point because the Minister has already given all the information he possesses and there is little else he can add.

In terms of the €200 million set aside for infrastructure, members know there are serious infrastructural deficiencies that need to be addressed. Will €200 million be sufficient to do so? Are other potential hosts asked to put forward the same amount?

During the Dáil debate on this issue, the Minister said he will purchase and dispose of commercial rights in whatever manner he sees fit. Could he give some clarity on what that means and will entail?

In terms of the Rio inquiry, he consistently argued for a non-statutory inquiry as it would be a 12-week inquiry and thus less time would be needed and all witnesses were willing to be forthright in their statements. As other members have said, it is now almost 12 months on. What is the hold up?

Deputy Mick Barry: Winning the bid and bringing the Rugby World Cup to Ireland in 2023 would be a hugely positive achievement and opportunity. That is not the focus of today's discussion. The purpose of this meeting is to drill down into the questions and answers that were perhaps skimmed over when the emergency legislation was rushed through the House. According to the Minister's statement, Rugby World Cup Limited has provided bidders with an indicative budget of €200 million and the Irish bid is in the region of that figure. That budget includes the cost of operating the tournament and providing for stadia upgrades. Stadia upgrades implies that the taxpayer and the State will be improving facilities that are not owned by the State. Is it the Minister's intention to gift that money or to get it back in full or in part? Will organisations other than the State potentially financially benefit from upgrades of a different character?

I welcome that all Irish matches will be broadcast free-to-air, as should be the case for all matches. During the Dáil debate on this issue I said that no lover of rugby or person who wants to bring his or her son or daughter to the games should be excluded because he or she does not have big wads of money in his or her pocket and that ticket prices must be fair, affordable, reasonable and inclusive. I understand that the Minister cannot give fine detail of ticket prices at this stage because they are tied up with the bid but how does he square the circle when there is surely a perverse incentive for high ticket prices? If the €200 million outlay is to be recouped

chiefly through ticket sales, it could point in the direction of higher ticket prices in order for that to be done. How does the Minister square that circle? Can he be more specific in relation to approximate prices? He said in the Dáil that prices will be more reasonable than for Rugby World Cup 2015 but all members know that ticket prices for that event were very much on the high side and, in some cases, astronomical. The Minister's statement that he will pitch ticket prices lower than they were at Rugby World Cup 2015 is not much of a guarantee. Will he be more specific?

This initiative must have a long-term legacy benefit to the State and rugby, which should be visible in public transport, broadband and, in particular, the clubs which nourish the grassroots of the game. Apart from the buzz, the feel-good factor and the level of interest, will the Minister indicate how the clubs will receive concrete benefits from the Rugby World Cup should Ireland win the competition to stage it as opposed to winning the competition *per se*, although I hope we will do that also?

Deputy Shane Ross: Let me deal first with Deputy Troy's questions on the budget, broadband etc. and who will pay for it. The tournament company will pay that cost, which will be part of the budget. That cost covers all the infrastructure the Deputy indicated will be necessary.

I will leave the question on a swimming pool in my constituency as that is a local authority matter. The ratio of games it is proposed to hold here versus Northern Ireland is 88:12. A question was asked concerning responsibility in the absence of the Northern Ireland Executive. As the Executive is not in place, power has been transferred to senior civil servants who will be able to act in place of the Executive. A letter was received from all the main political parties pledging their support for this in the event of the Executive returning. In the event that it does not return, I do not foresee a difficulty with this matter as the top civil servants in Northern Ireland can sign off on the deal. We will take the primary role if the problem in Northern Ireland is not resolved. We would then do a side deal with Northern Ireland, which would act as secondary guarantor. We would give the full guarantee in such a scenario.

All members asked questions on ticket prices. Let us be straight on this issue. This is market-led and is meant to make a profit. It is not intended that it will operate at a loss for anybody. The ticket prices will be market-led but competitively priced. Many projections have been done on this issue. On the basis that the tickets will be competitively priced, all the projections that have been done show we should make a profit when prices are lower than at previous Rugby World Cup tournaments.

Deputy Robert Troy: What are the projections?

Deputy Shane Ross: It would be wrong to reveal detailed figures. However, many projections have been done and, as I stated in the Seanad last night, some of them were done on the basis that some tickets would cost as little as €20.

I was asked who is preventing publication of the report on the Rio Olympics. It would be irresponsible to publish the report without advice from lawyers for reasons with which we are all familiar. We do not want to prejudice matters that will take place in other jurisdictions. I will not say any more than that on the issue.

Deputy Munster is quite right that it is not acceptable to legislate in such a hurry. We would prefer not to legislate this way but I have explained the sequence of events. We were only alerted to the need to produce legislation on, I believe, 7 April last.

The Deputy also asked whether €200 million would be sufficient for infrastructure for the event. The figure is indicative and we have never claimed it was precise. However, the final figure should not be much more or less than €200 million. It must be remembered that this money will not be spent without an expectation that it will be refunded. I hope a flood of tickets will be bought and the €200 million cost will come to naught. We anticipate a surplus. This figure will cover the upgrades of the stadia, which have been thoroughly examined by a large number of experts.

I reiterate the point I made regarding the inquiry into events at the Rio Olympics. Members are incorrect in claiming it is 12 months since it started. It is probably ten or 11 months but everyone loves to make the leap to a full year.

Deputy Robert Troy: It will be 12 months if we do not debate the report until September.

Deputy Shane Ross: Let us be accurate; it is now July although I accept this has gone on for some time. Given the legal implications, however, it would be utterly irresponsible to jump that particular gun.

Deputy Robert Troy: The legal implications also applied when the inquiry was established.

Chairman: In fairness to the Minister, he is entitled to his opinion on this matter.

Deputy Shane Ross: Deputy Troy would not be Deputy Troy if he did not interrupt me regularly.

Deputy Imelda Munster: I asked a question about the commercial rights to the event. The Minister indicated he would purchase and dispose of them. I ask him to clarify that statement.

Deputy Shane Ross: We can bid for the commercial rights if we want to, although I cannot say if we have or will do so, what we are paying or anything of that nature. It is then up to us to decide what we do with the rights. We would have an option to sell them on if we so wished. It is a commercial decision.

Deputy Barry asked about upgrades to stadia. The upgrades would be temporary to allow the stadia in question to host games, in other words, they would involve upgrading facilities. This will have legacy benefits. The tournament budget provides for investment in approximately 40 training facilities nationwide for visiting teams. Many of these facilities will be in existing clubs, both rugby and other sports, which will leave a legacy of improved facilities for the clubs in question. The tournament budget will also provide for a legacy programme for the development of the sport. Although some temporary facilities will be developed in host stadia, the permanent facilities, for example, floodlights, will leave a positive legacy for the stadiums. There will also be a legacy of long-term benefit for tourism from the profile and prospect of repeat visits.

Deputy Barry also asked a question on ticket prices, an issue I addressed in the most specific manner possible. We hope to benefit in the long term in many of the ways to which I referred. We will provide permanent facilities such as broadband and other infrastructure which will be necessary for the Rugby World Cup.

Deputy Mick Barry: I seek clarity on a specific point. For argument's sake, if improvements costing €5 million were made to Croke Park, would taxpayers pay the cost for improve-

ments that will become a legacy benefit for the GAA or would the GAA pay for it in full or in part?

Deputy Shane Ross: The cost would come from the tournament budget and any permanent facilities would remain in place. The GAA will benefit permanently from such improvements.

Deputy Mick Barry: It will not pay for them or make a contribution to their cost.

Deputy Shane Ross: It will make a substantial contribution by offering the stadium.

Deputy Mick Barry: It is not a financial contribution.

Chairman: Glaoim anois ar an Seanadóir Pádraig Ó Céidigh.

Senator Pádraig Ó Céidigh: Ní bheidh mé i bhfad because I know the Minister must leave soon, as it is almost 10 a.m. It is difficult to get an opportunity to speak at such a short meeting. I congratulate the Minister and his Department on getting this legislation through quickly. We can all be critical, but this is the first time that all the parties came together to support an issue. One of the things I am sick and tired of in this place is people objecting for the sake of objecting. For the first time all the parties are putting the people into the centre, and I hope this is the first of many such Bills. I congratulate the Minister and thank him for his feedback on the Attorney General's advice. I was concerned about that as well.

Does the Department have a ten or 15-year strategy to get major, world-class sporting events to Ireland? I believe this is critical. I was on the board of Fáilte Ireland in 2005 and 2006 at the time it applied for and got the Ryder Cup. That was the first major international world event. Since then we have had the Solheim Cup, the Special Olympics, the Volvo Ocean Race in my home town of Galway on two occasions, and now we are bidding for the 2023 Rugby World Cup. I would like to see a 15-year strategy brought back before this committee which plans to get world-class events to Ireland. We can and we do punch way above our weight. The Minister may not be in a position to answer this question based on the replies he gave earlier, but I would like us to put the taxpayer right in the middle. I can see some of the cost-benefit analysis of this. The real benefit here is the €760 million from tourism that is going to go straight into the industry, with €138 million to €140 million coming straight back to the Exchequer. In other words, for the €200 million investment to be recouped we will have to sell in the region of €60 million worth of tickets. Will the Minister provide a break-even analysis for this committee?

It is fantastic that the GAA is involved in this. It is a voluntary body, contrary to what Deputy Barry seemed to suggest. Almost 1.5 million people are involved in the GAA, and they are very active in supporting the World Cup bid. It is not just the IRFU, but right across the whole spectrum of the community. That has to be highlighted.

Is there a 15 to 20-year plan? If not, will the Department look at putting together such a plan? In terms of a cost-benefit analysis, what is the worst-case scenario and what is the best-case scenario? We need to know to ensure taxpayers are getting the best return on investment they can.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: We are all supportive of the bid to host the tournament. I echo some of the criticisms of the way it was legislated for. We need to look at the risks. We can certainly see where the benefits are, not least that it is an all-Ireland bid. There are many intangibles, and the key area is risk. Financial risk is one aspect but there are all sorts of other things that have to be considered, such as increased costs of security. Something that comes

to mind immediately is that there are some areas where we are deficient. Stadia and sporting facilities can be improved. There is certainly a deficiency in terms of public transport and hotel accommodation and there is no way we are going to play catch-up in the time available. Having said that, when I looked at the bid that France made for the soccer World Cup I noted that while they had great public transport, it was not available when the tournament was on because of industrial disputes. Risk is the issue, and the range of risks that are being considered are the things that we need to be satisfied on. That is the job we are asked to do here.

On ticket pricing, there is a parallel between the Rio de Janeiro Olympics and how we conduct our business. It may be possible for us to bid directly. What will be put in place to make sure the risk of selling on tickets at exorbitant prices is avoided? That is something that authorities tried to crack down on during those Olympics. I believe we are being made fools of by this inquiry. There was a three-month deadline, and the Minister would have taken legal advice in advance of that. Names would have always been a part of an inquiry, whether it was statutory or non-statutory. It is completely unsatisfactory that we were given timelines and assurances of all descriptions, but we are still now no nearer to having this published. I am sure the Minister got legal advice in advance. Did that legal advice flag this particular risk, and if that was the case why is there this delay?

The Minister made an announcement yesterday. We were all out in Abbotstown and were hugely impressed with the facilities there. One of the things that impressed us was that it was cross-sports and that there was a consolidation rather than the fragmentation that we often see. What was not clear from the Minister's announcement yesterday was that the IRFU, which is going to be hugely supported now by the State and by the public, had said that it would not commence building outdoor pitches until there was clarity on phase two. Is that one of the issues that will be looked at in the context of this bid? It would seem more than unfortunate if the support was coming from one side and then the IRFU decided not to collaborate on the outdoor pitches. That is a really important piece of this campus.

Chairman: This is the last speaker, so I would ask the Minister to stay with us. We were very happy to facilitate him and are happy to have him come back again. I will have a couple of questions after Deputy Fitzmaurice. The Minister will be able to leave early enough, I hope.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: I welcome this bid. I believe that everyone in the Dáil, the Seanad and across Ireland supports it. I know the Minister may not be able to give certain details. He expects to make money from this, but is there a top figure we are willing to spend in order that we are not completely exposed to an open chequebook?

It is great to see Páirc Uí Chaoimh with a new facility, as well as Semple Stadium, Thomond Park, the Aviva and Croke Park. Is the Minister open to the idea of spreading the tournament throughout the country and supporting the west of Ireland in having a main stadium for all sports? It is in the spirit of the bid that we spread the prosperity and tourism side of the World Cup to all parts of Ireland.

Chairman: Beidh an tAire anois againn.

Deputy Shane Ross: I will take those questions now, starting with Senator Ó Céidigh's. Fortunately, Ireland has a strategy for attracting events in the years to come and hosting the Rugby World Cup would obviously be a base for that. I do not know whether that strategy is for ten or 15 years but I do know that there is a long-term strategy in place. If we get the Rugby World Cup, our ambitions can then extend even further. We have the Women's Rugby World

Cup coming up this year, which is a highly prestigious event even if it has not attracted the kind of commercial intake we had hoped. Nevertheless, it will put us on the map and help us with our bid.

I am very energised by the idea of sports tourism, though I am not sure that it has necessarily caught on in the circles in which I would like it to. It has not yet caught fire as an idea because some people persist in looking at tourism in a very conventional way. Sports tourism may, in fact, be the way of the future for Ireland and it is something to which we have to give serious consideration. Senator Feighan's suggestion about the Commonwealth Games is very much in line with that.

Senator Pádraig Ó Céidigh: It is a great idea.

Deputy Shane Ross: We are now thinking in these terms and it is very exciting. Let us think about the Olympics. Why not? I remember Gay Mitchell suggesting this a few years ago and he was laughed to scorn and told that it was not possible. It is now a real and realistic prospect. If we build up our stadia and present ourselves as a credible bidder - which we obviously are, especially if win this rugby bid - then the sky is the limit. I think the Senator is right and Fáilte Ireland is certainly promoting this. New Zealand, for example, followed up its hosting of the Rugby World Cup with both the Cricket World Cup and the FIFA U-17 World Cup. This current bid holds the prospect of opening new channels for us and we should certainly be thinking in those terms.

There are two political features of this project that I consider to be particularly exciting. One is the North-South aspect. It is fantastic that there do not seem to be any political difficulties involved in this at all. There is enthusiasm from all communities, be they those without a rugby tradition or those in Northern Ireland who might have difficulties in doing anything in the context of a united Ireland. It is fantastic that both have joined together in this without any difficulty or acrimony. The fact that the GAA has been so incredibly willing to help the IRFU with this project is really encouraging. That is the direction in which we are moving.

Deputy Catherine Murphy asked where the risks lie. As the Deputy knows, people have mentioned figures like €200 million or €300 million. These kinds of figures will never materialise. We are absolutely sure of that. That would be in a scenario where no tickets whatsoever were sold, whereas we, in fact, expect to go into surplus. What is important to note in the context of risk is the fact that we have taken out cancellation insurance. That is very important. The cancellation insurance does not cover eventualities like a big team being knocked out very early and that kind of thing is certainly a risk. What it covers are things like terrorist offences, acts of God, etc., leading to cancellation. Further risks are covered in the budget. Of course, there are certain things that we cannot guard against. The danger of the figures not being as good as in past Rugby World Cup competitions is always there but it is very small. In comparison with the Rugby World Cup hosted in the United Kingdom, for example, we expect to get a huge number of British visitors. That obviously did not apply in the British case because they were already there. The British fans are the best travellers of the lot. There certainly are risks, then, but we have taken every precaution, both in terms of the insurance I mentioned but also the thorough forensic risk examination that we have been carrying out for the past four years. This has looked at all the risks and we think that it is a risk worth taking.

I now come to the issue of hotels, accommodation shortages and pricing. This remains something of an unknown because we do not know where we are going to be in 2023. We have looked at this crisis, which is a difficulty at present, particularly in Dublin. The tournament will

take place in Ireland's shoulder season of September and October. This is really good time to host it, not just for tourism and sports tourism, but also because there will not be the same critical pressure on hotel beds that there would be in mid-summer. We estimate that we will need 2.7 million bed nights for tourism and we have 12.2 million beds over this period. An agreement has already been reached with the Irish Hotels Federation and the Northern Ireland Hotels Federation on availability and pricing for the tournament. Regarding capacity in Dublin, 6,000 additional beds are anticipated by 2020. This will have improved further by 2023. Much of the tournament, of course, will take place outside Dublin so I do not anticipate this being the problem in 2023 that it is today.

In response to the question about ticket reselling, we have been asked by World Rugby and UEFA to look at measures to counter unauthorised ticket sales. We are doing so, and there is an ongoing consultation process on this by the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. We will continue to look at possible legislation in this regard. This is certainly something of which we have to be conscious because ticket touting on a massive scale would damage the State's reputation.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Is there any clarity on the issue of the campus and the IRFU?

Deputy Shane Ross: The IRFU will make no money unless it puts money in. That has not yet been dealt with.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: I meant with regard to the Minister's statement yesterday about phase 2 of the sports campus.

Deputy Shane Ross: That is going ahead, yes.

Deputy Catherine Murphy: Will the IRFU be building their outdoor pitches? Is there any clarity on that?

Deputy Shane Ross: Can I come back to the Deputy on that matter? I do not know the answer. Sorry.

Deputy Fitzmaurice talked about exposure. I cannot tell the Deputy what the level of exposure is, but it is capped and is not an alarming figure. The Deputy's second question concerned spreading the wealth. Did he mean this in a concrete way in respect of the Rugby World Cup itself or did he mean it generally?

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: I meant it with regard to the Rugby World Cup, particularly in terms of facilities. Páirc Uí Chaoimh, for example, is now a great facility. We also have the Aviva Stadium and Thomond Park, so we have great facilities in some parts of the country. With this bid now coming, would the Minister be open to the idea of rugby, GAA and soccer getting together - with some help - to develop a really good stadium in the west of Ireland? This would be a focal point for the people of the west but if we were to get this World Cup, it would also serve to bring people to all parts of the country. There has been talk of Pearse Stadium, but it is a nightmare.

Senator Frank Feighan: It was not so bad on Sunday.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: I am talking about access to the stadium. We need a focal point in the west, and in all the other places, to spread the benefit throughout the country. We would then also get the bed nights.

Deputy Shane Ross: Galway is on the long list, as is Castlebar. The west has been in no way neglected here.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: I am talking about a good stadium, something like the Aviva or Thomond Park. We need a new stadium in the west to cater for these kinds of things.

Deputy Shane Ross: If a good commercial case could be made for it, I am sure that the tournament company would look at that. It is not a matter for me. Please note, however, that Castlebar and Galway are already on the long list so the tournament will be geographically spread.

Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice: I know that.

Chairman: I thank the Minister for attending today and engaging with the committee. This has been a most informative and interesting meeting.

I would like to raise two points with the Minister. This is my first meeting as Chairman and I found the meeting to be very constructive, which I hope will continue. Some excellent suggestions have been made that I hope the Department will take on board.

I ask the Minister to confirm that as soon as the Moran inquiry is finalised, and it is agreed legally by the Attorney General that it can be published, he will attend a meeting here or as soon as possible thereafter to discuss its contents.

Deputy Shane Ross: Yes.

Chairman: I would appreciate if the Minister will bring along my colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Griffin. I would love to see him here. I look forward to meeting him here in an official capacity.

I welcome the co-operation and involvement by the different bodies and Departments. I have a question on the democratic process of accountability and the Minister's commitment to update the committee and answer questions in the Dáil on a six-monthly basis. When the report is completed, and whether we get it or not, is there any part of the documentation that will not be subject to freedom of information, FOI, provisions? Will there be total transparency in terms of democratic accountability when the process is finished, particularly in view of the issues that arise in other jurisdictions over major events like this one? We can come back to the matter later.

Deputy Shane Ross: I am trying to think on my feet. The tournament company will not be fully owned by us.

Chairman: What about the correspondence?

Deputy Shane Ross: The correspondence can probably be requested under FOI.

Chairman: Yes. What does the Minister think?

Deputy Shane Ross: Any correspondence from me can be requested under FOI, as far as I know, unless it is commercially sensitive. The tournament company will be majority-owned by others.

Chairman: I accept that. I just want to know where the State money will be invested and the extent of the involvement by the Department. I am happy to return to the matter later.

Deputy Shane Ross: In terms of FOI, the company will probably not be a listed body. Obviously, I am accountable to the committee for anything the State does in that sense.

Chairman: Yes.

Deputy Shane Ross: I do not think the tournament company will be a listed body.

Chairman: Will the oversight board be subject to FOI?

Deputy Shane Ross: The committee should be entitled to invite the board in and ask questions.

Chairman: I will speak to the Minister about the matter later.

Deputy Shane Ross: Yes.

Chairman: First, it is hugely important for me to state that we are 100% behind the Minister in every respect. Second, there must be total accountability and transparency after the event. I accept that it would be after the event in terms of issues that might arise.

Deputy Shane Ross: We have nothing to hide at all.

Chairman: That is my point. I thank the Minister for attending. I look forward to seeing him shortly when the Moran report hopefully is published.

Deputy Shane Ross: I thank the Chairman.

Chairman: I propose that we go into private session to discuss housekeeping matters. Is that agreed? Agreed.

The joint committee went into private session at 10.25 a.m. and adjourned at 11 a.m. until 9 a.m. on Wednesday, 20 September 2017.