



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

SEANAD ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithé*
(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

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SEANAD ÉIREANN

Dé Máirt, 12 Meitheamh 2018

Tuesday, 12 June 2018

Chuaigh an Leas-Chathaoirleach i gceannas ar 2.30 p.m.

Machnamh agus Paidir.
Reflection and Prayer.

Business of Seanad

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I have received notice from Senator Jerry Buttmer that, on the motion for the Commencement of the House today, he proposes to raise the following matter:

The need for the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to establish a passport printing service in the Passport Office in Cork city.

I have also received notice from Senator Aidan Davitt of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to outline how his Department plans to deal with tenants at risk of becoming homeless as a result of landlords withdrawing from the rental accommodation scheme, RAS, and tenants not having the option of applying for the housing assistance payment, HAP, or rent allowance schemes.

I have also received notice from Senator Colette Kelleher of the following matter:

The need for the Minister of State at the Department of Health with special responsibility for mental health and older people to outline his views on the findings of the mid-term review of the implementation of the national dementia strategy.

I have also received notice from Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection to review the decision not to fund the joint application by the Bluestack Special Needs Foundation, Inishowen Children's Autism Related Education, iCARE, Limited and Extern under the Ability programme.

I have also received notice from Senator Máire Devine of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport to outline the plans he has, in conjunction with the local authority and the GAA, to preserve the Dolphin Park GAA pitch in Dublin 8.

I have also received notice from Senator Maura Hopkins of the following matter:

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The need for the Minister for Education and Skills to provide an update on the funding for category 7 projects under the summer works scheme.

I have also received notice from Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to make a statement on the national planning framework and if he will clarify why no official report on stage 1 and stage 2 submissions under the national planning framework was provided.

I have also received notice from Senator James Reilly of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment to outline to the residents of Skerries that he will deal with the specific water shortage issues in Skerries, County Dublin, and if he will provide supplementary funding to Irish Water for emergency remedial works to fix this water supply issue as soon as possible.

I have also received notice from Senator Fintan Warfield of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to collate data on LGBT homeless.

I have also received notice from Senator Rose Conway-Walsh of the following matter:

The need for the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the plans he has to reduce the administration workload of teaching principals in small schools by introducing at least one administration day per week.

Of the matters raised by the Senators suitable for discussion, I have selected those raised by Senators Buttmer, Davitt, Kelleher and Mac Lochlainn and they will be taken now. I regret I had to rule out of order the matter submitted by Senator Reilly on the ground that the Minister has no official responsibility in the matter. The other Senators may give notice on another day of the matters that they wish to raise.

Commencement Matters

Passport Services

Senator Jerry Buttmer: I welcome Minister of State, Deputy Halligan, to the House. The issue I raise is one that has become a source of contention given the fear and worry of some people about the deadline for passport applications. I will preface my remarks by complimenting the excellent staff of our Passport Offices in Dublin but in particular in Cork. I had the pleasure of using the service in Cork. I commend the passport card. It is an example on which we can really work.

This is the critical season for travel. We have only two Passport Offices, one in Dublin and one in Cork. Since 2017 we have seen an increased and a complex workload in the Cork office with entitlement checks required in passport applications from the North, the UK and foreign missions. The Cork Passport Office processes one third of all passports. Since 2017, 800,000 passports have been issued but all have been printed in one central location in Balbriggan. The figures from March show that there has been a backlog, in some cases of 70,000 applications. I accept we have seen the provision of 200 extra temporary staff in the Passport Office during this

critical period. However, in tandem with the need for a printing machine in Cork, we should see an increase in the number of permanent staff in the Passport Office.

It is important to recognise that more and more people are travelling. The recession has ended and people are applying for passports. There are more first-time applicants, more young families travelling with children. Therefore, there is a need for a passport printing machine in Cork in order that we can ensure expeditious processing and printing of passports and that we can reduce the turnaround time for applicants. There should be a passport printing machine in Cork because, as the Minister of State knows, it is not just about Cork but it is about the province of Munster and the hinterland. This will make it easier for everybody, including the staff and for those travelling abroad.

I hope the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Coveney, who cannot be here, will be able to look in a positive manner at the need for the people of Cork and Munster to have such a facility. I know we do more and more online but we have one location for printing. We must make it easier for people requiring emergency passports or people who must travel to Dublin to get their passports by having such a facility in Cork. It might also ease the gridlock and the congestion in Dublin.

I thank the Minister of State, Deputy Halligan, for being here and look forward to his reply. I will conclude by complimenting the staff in the passport office in Cork. I hope those who have gone in to the office have found it as easy as I have. I am certainly not proficient in technology but being able to go in, make one's appointments, wait for between ten and 15 minutes, come back, have one's business done and receive one's passport card or the passport itself in an expeditious manner is something we all want. This could be done better by having a printing machine in Cork.

Minister of State at the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy John Halligan): I apologise for the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, who is unable to be here today. I thank Senator Jerry Buttmer, who does a wonderful job representing his local area of Cork, for this important question.

This is a peak season for the passport service. The total number of applications received during the first four months of this year rose by 10% compared to the same period last year and by 25% compared to two years ago. There are several drivers of demand, including a trend towards early renewal of passports, the growth in outbound travel and the growing population, to which the Senator alluded. The passport service, located in the Department, is one unified service composed of three constituent offices on Mount Street in Dublin, Balbriggan in County Dublin and South Mall in Cork, respectively. The public offices in Mount Street and Cork accept applications from all categories of applicants by appointment at their public counters. Where appropriate, these offices also facilitate the issuance of emergency passports where there is a need to travel for medical reasons or due to bereavement abroad. Applications from across Ireland, Great Britain and through Ireland's network of embassies and consulates worldwide are distributed for processing across the three passport offices. Resources are allocated on the basis of an assessment of demand, in line with the passport service's targeted processing dates. Both Passport Express and online applications are sent back to the applicant based in Ireland with a next-day delivery service. Therefore, wherever applications for passports are processed, Irish residents will receive their passports within the same timeframe.

The passport service operates these three passport printing machines. Two are located in

our main production facility in Balbriggan and one is located in the passport office on Mount Street. All applications are processed through the centralised, automated passport service, APS. This means that all production facilities can print the passport, irrespective of which channel the application was processed through. The printing system allows for flexibility between printing machines if any machine reaches capacity. Where pressures arise in the processing system, they are generally associated with the necessary checking and verification process which must be followed to ensure the integrity of the Irish passport and which cannot be compromised. Given the scale of the passport service's investment in specialised and efficient machinery, we have sufficient resources to meet the technological requirements of passport production.

Passport printing and the personalisation of each passport requires highly specialised machinery, auxiliary equipment and a temperature controlled environment. The purchase cost of a new passport printing machine alone is in excess of €1.7 million. This does not include the cost of security, technical costs, outfitting, staffing and rental. Prior to installing any additional printing facility, we would have to consider the physical suitability of any building and the suitability of the location to cater for the installation of such a specialised machine, physical security considerations and the availability of maintenance services. Any such production facility would incur costs above and beyond the purchase of the machine itself and would include security, support and maintenance charges. Given that the current three printing machines meet the passport service's printing demands and have additional capacity, and given the costs and requirements associated with the purchase and support of a new machine, I do not believe that, right now, there is justification on a value for money or operational basis to purchase an additional printing machine.

Senator Jerry Buttiner: I thank the Minister of State, Deputy Halligan, for being here and taking the Commencement matter. The reply should recognise that the Passport Office and its staff are exceptional. The service is dealing with unprecedented demand, as the Minister of State outlined. Three of the printing machines are located in Dublin where life does not end or begin. Beyond the M50 there is a great need in Cork. As an example, if we are talking about ambitions in terms of reform and innovation, why can a printing machine not be located in Cork and thereby facilitate the people of Cork and the Munster region?

I thank the Minister of State for his reply. Notwithstanding what he read, there is a justifiable case to be made for having a printing machine in Cork. I accept that we are moving into a different era in terms of technology and how people apply for a passport and that perhaps there might come a time when having a passport will be irrelevant, that people will have a chip somewhere. Nonetheless, it is something we should keep on the table. There is an excellent Passport Office in Cork which would be augmented and supported if it had a printing machine.

Deputy John Halligan: I again thank the Senator and concur with what he said. I take the opportunity to acknowledge the dedication and professionalism with which Passport Office staff in Cork and Dublin meet the challenges posed during periods of peak demand such, as well as the service they provide for the public all year round. This year the Passport Office received sanction for the appointment of 220 temporary clerical officers to the offices in Dublin and Cork in accordance with the volume of applications to each of the offices. Forty of the temporary clerical officers were assigned to the Passport Office in Cork. In addition, ten clerical officers and one executive officer have joined the office's permanent staff since the beginning of the year. Therefore, there is an acknowledgement by the Department that the office in Cork is a fundamental part of the passport issuing system. In terms of recognition, it is the only place outside Dublin that has an office. Many people from my constituency and surrounding counties

use the Cork office more than the Dublin office.

Having spoken to the Department to prepare my information and to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade today, I have learned that there is an initial cost of €1.7 million. If one adds the cost of security, technical issues and work on the building, they could drive the cost up to €2 million, which would be huge, given that the Passport Office states it can deal adequately with the pressures it is under, although that could change owing to Brexit. I suggest to the Senator that there has been an acknowledgement of the Cork office, given the extra staff assigned to it, and that within a year or two, although I am not saying it will happen, the applications process might very well change.

Rental Accommodation Scheme

Senator Aidan Davitt: I thank the Minister of State, Deputy Damien English, for coming into the House to take this matter, despite his busy schedule. He has seen an outline of it and I know that he has prepared a detailed reply.

The matter was brought to my attention by Councillor Pat Fitzgerald who is well known in Arklow and a great champion of the locals. He came across an incident, of which I was not aware, although I deal with many housing issues and applications. It involved a tenant in a house included in the rental accommodation scheme, RAS. The landlord evidently decided to sell the house, so it fell on the council to rehouse the tenants. They had been removed from the housing list and could not qualify for RAS or additional help with their rent. This seems to be an anomaly in the system and I cannot understand why. If someone is on RAS and the house he or she is renting is sold or made otherwise unavailable for whatever reason, which is common nowadays, that tenant cannot return to his or her original place on the housing list or fall back into the HAP net, to which everyone else is entitled, and get assistance with finding other private housing. Instead, the tenant must deal with the council, which must house that person directly. The Minister of State knows more than most, however, that the councils do not have enough houses. In the case in question, the tenants ended up in temporary accommodation because they seemed to fall between two rocks.

I hope that the Minister of State has some enlightening news to give on this matter rather than some statement written by someone in the Department. He has a great understanding of these issues.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I thank the Senator for raising this issue and acknowledge his concerns about the operation of the rental accommodation scheme. I should be able to bring some clarity to the matter, given that it is down to interpretation, and I welcome the opportunity to discuss it in the Seanad. This issue has crossed our desks recently via various people.

RAS was first introduced in 2004 and has met the housing needs of tens of thousands of households in the private rental sector by providing them with more security than rent supplement and the ability to increase their household incomes without the risk of losing their housing support. Close to 19,000 families are living in rental accommodation with the support of this scheme. RAS continues to be an effective mechanism for meeting housing need and an additional 1,800 households are targeted for transfer from rent supplement to RAS-supported tenancies between 2018 and 2021.

With the increase in rent supplement recipients transferring to HAP, the number of new RAS tenancies created annually will reduce. RAS operates as a three-way arrangement between a landlord, a tenant and a local authority. These arrangements can be for a variety of periods. In each case, the tenant-landlord relationship is protected by the obligations of both parties set out in the Residential Tenancies Act. The agreements are often for ten years or more. RAS arrangements may come to an end either where a fixed-term contract is ending or the tenancy is being terminated by the landlord in accordance with the provisions of the Residential Tenancies Act. The majority of contracts do not end unless there is a built-in arrangement with the local authority. The normal contract is for a fixed term.

In every circumstance, there is a period of several months in advance of the arrangement ending that provides local authorities with the opportunity to negotiate a renewal of the contract with the property owner or other options to secure the property for social housing use, including a different lease arrangement or purchase for the social housing stock, given that it has already been in use in that form for several years. We have made this clear to local authorities and encourage them to consider these options.

When a RAS tenancy comes to an end with no prospect of renewing or otherwise securing the use of the property for social housing, the local authority has a responsibility to find alternative accommodation for that tenant. In circumstances where the local authority is unable to find alternative accommodation from its own stock or from new properties that become available as part of its development pipeline during the period prior to the arrangement coming to an end, HAP may be considered as an alternative housing solution for the household, subject to the agreement of the tenant. As such, HAP is an option, and we will clear up the matter of its interpretation where any doubt exists.

In this context, it is important that there be a shared understanding of one of the specific differences between HAP and other forms of social housing support. By definition and design, HAP is a flexible, tenant-led form of housing support, allowing tenants to choose the accommodation they wish to live in, subject to certain criteria. When a HAP tenancy comes to an end, there is no obligation on the local authority to source alternative accommodation for the tenant. As the housing authority, however, I naturally expect local authorities to support those receiving housing assistance in securing alternative accommodation. My Department is preparing detailed guidance to assist local authorities in these circumstances and ensure there is clarity on how the practicalities of the transition from RAS or another form of social housing to HAP can be managed.

As housing authorities, local authorities require a variety of flexible options to meet the needs of those on waiting lists which work in the local authority property markets. The RAS continues to be an important solution in that regard but the national roll-out of HAP now complete, the number of new RAS tenancies commencing will decline, although there will be up to 2,000 over the next three to four years. It remains the case that local authorities should be doing everything in their power to ensure that households currently accommodated in RAS arrangements that may shortly be coming to an end are provided with secure accommodation to meet their long-term housing need. HAP should be considered as one of those solutions. Let me be clear about that. It is black and white and we will issue guidelines to make it even clearer.

Senator Aidan Davitt: I am delighted the Minister of State, Deputy English, is here because he has a good grasp of the housing issue. It is certainly the answer I wanted to hear. It is a practical answer. It is a change in policy, or a change from what was in some letters we

received from the Department, of which I am sure the Minister of State is aware. He is doing work on this behind the scenes. I am sure it would not have changed otherwise. I appreciate the change in stance from what was in the documentation we received in the past couple of months. I appreciate the Minister of State's good work and common sense on the issue.

Deputy Damien English: I thank Senator Davitt for raising this issue. It is important we bring clarity to the issue and I am happy to do that.

National Dementia Strategy

Acting Chairman (Senator Ned O'Sullivan): I welcome the Minister of State at the Department of Health, Deputy Catherine Byrne, to the House.

Senator Colette Kelleher: I thank the Cathaoirleach for allowing me to raise this important issue. I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Catherine Byrne, to the House. The Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly, has responsibility for this issue, so I hope the Minister of State, Deputy Catherine Byrne, will be able to pass this on. Dementia is an issue that affects people in every community in Ireland. There are an estimated 55,000 people with dementia in Ireland. The number is set to double by 2036. People with dementia need a wide range of community services and support to assist them from the moment of diagnosis and we are all aware of significant gaps that exist in these vital services.

In December 2014, the Government published Ireland's first national dementia strategy. The strategy was welcome and has the potential to improve the lives of people living with dementia in Ireland. The mid-term review of the implementation of the national dementia strategy has now been published. The review acknowledges that the strategy was initially intended to be cost neutral. Since publication of the strategy in 2014, the understanding of the scale of need and how that need should be met has deepened considerably. There is now an acknowledgment that the strategies to meet the needs of people with dementia will rightly call on the public purse.

The mid-term review acknowledges that the pace of implementation can be frustrating but I would say it is traumatic for people living with dementia, their families and service providers as they are still dealing with inadequate services and are waiting for supports. It also states that additional funding or redeployment of existing resources will be required to move from this preparatory implementation phase into the establishment of new dementia services, supports and structures. Specifically, the review notes that considerable resources, both financial and staffing, will be required in the following areas: post diagnostic and diagnostic support pathways; key posts in which I would include dementia advisers to close the gaps identified in the recently published mapping project; appropriate home care for the growing population, even though we are at capacity for home care at present; an appropriate care pathway for people in acute hospitals because people go to hospital with dementia and come out considerably worse; and the provision of immediate options for care other than nursing home care. There is a need for a dedicated budget.

The first strategy was co-financed between Atlantic Philanthropies, which donated €12.5 million, and the Department of Health. At the same time it should be noted that the Alzheimer's Society of Ireland contributed €14 million, which was more than the sum contributed by the Atlantic Philanthropies and almost as much as the Government.

This funding now comes to an end in 2018. Multi-annual funding is critically needed beyond 2018 because we know that dementia is not going away. In fact, it is going to increase. We cannot rely on shaking buckets and the goodwill of people to finance core services.

3 o'clock As a co-convenor of the all-party Oireachtas group, along with Deputy Mary Butler, I am acutely aware of the lack of equity in the provision of dementia services. To mention one service as an example, counties Wexford, Laois and Leitrim do not have any day care services. People in just 13 counties have access to dementia advisers. The provision of dementia-specific services is patchy and based on a geographic lottery. There is no link between the needs of people with dementia and what is available to them.

Today is the first day of carer's week. We often break the health of elderly people by requiring them to provide care to people with dementia, which is an unacceptable burden. In our budget 2018 proposals, we advised the Government to provide funding for 30 dementia advisers and to increase this number to 90 over time. The all-party Oireachtas group also identified gaps in intensive home care for people who wish to stay at home in their communities. We also advised on supports for people with Down's syndrome, who are much more likely than the general population to develop dementia. These needs were not addressed in the last budget. We were not listened to.

I am asking the Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly, to give a commitment that he will listen to these proposals, which are quite modest relative to the scale of need. They should be included and prioritised in budget 2019. I welcome the work of the HSE's National Dementia Office, which needs resources so it can do its work. The strategy needs to be resourced properly. We need to plug the gap in dementia services so that we do not place unacceptable burdens on carers. Therefore, I call on the Minister of State to ensure the findings of the mid-term review are acted on. He should set out specific actions and the timeframe within which those actions will be taken. The needs, gaps and solutions of people with dementia and their carers have been identified and well documented.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Catherine Byrne): On behalf of the Minister of State, Deputy Jim Daly, I thank Senator Kelleher for raising this matter. The national dementia strategy, which was published in 2014, sets out a framework for the development of dementia supports and services in Ireland. The overarching aim of the strategy is to provide dementia care so that people with dementia can live well for as long as possible and can live out their lives in comfort and dignity with services and supports delivered in the best way possible.

As part of the implementation of the national dementia strategy, the Department of Health committed to conducting a mid-term review of the progress being made. This review, which was prepared in partnership with the National Dementia Office, highlights the considerable amount of work that has been completed to date and the actions that are to be carried out over the next 12 months. The review was launched on 23 May last and is available on the website of the Department of Health.

The implementation of the national dementia strategy was boosted at the time of its launch by a joint programme of investment by the HSE and the Atlantic Philanthropies which was valued at €27.5 million. This investment allowed a number of key actions in the strategy to be resourced and implemented. It part-funded a programme that offers education and clinical resources for general practitioners and primary care teams, intensive homecare packages for people with dementia, the Understand Together awareness campaign and the establishment

of the National Dementia Office. The National Dementia Office, which has an important role in implementing the national dementia strategy, has made substantial progress in developing evidence-based care pathways for people with dementia.

A dementia diagnostic project has been set up to ensure timely diagnosis of dementia. A post-diagnostic support pathway project will offer the information and support that people with dementia and their families need following a diagnosis. Work is ongoing to develop a dementia care pathway within acute hospitals. Clinical guidelines are being developed on the appropriate use of psychotropic medications in people with dementia. Education programmes have been developed for health and social care professionals, public-facing staff and carers. Other important work undertaken by the National Dementia Office includes mapping of dementia-specific, community-based services in partnership with the Alzheimer Society of Ireland, and a review of the dementia information resources that are currently available. The Department recognises that full implementation of the strategy will require investment and change.

The Minister of State, Deputy Daly, has held high level meetings with his officials and the HSE and acknowledges that further work needs to be done to fully implement the strategy. The level of funding for dementia services will be considered as part of the national Estimates and budgetary process.

Changes are needed in how the HSE organises and delivers its services and, equally, additional investment is needed to fill gaps in services and expand existing services to meet the needs of the rising numbers of people with dementia. The Department is committed to implementing the national dementia strategy in full and ensuring a provision of services that meets the needs of people with dementia across the country. I will come back in to answer some of the Senator's other questions.

Senator Colette Kelleher: I thank the Minister of State for her response. It is good to hear that the Department of Health recognises that full implementation of the strategy will require investment and change. I am looking for specifics from the Minister of State on what that change will involve. That is why I tabled this Commencement matter. Indicating good intent or that something will happen is not the same as giving detail. It certainly does not give people with dementia and their carers the kind of information and comfort they need.

The Minister of State noted the following:

The Minister of State, Deputy Daly, has held high level meetings with his officials and the HSE and acknowledges that further work needs to be done to fully implement the strategy. The level of funding for dementia services will be considered as part of the national Estimates and budgetary process.

How much funding will be provided next year and in the years after that? By 2036, more than 100,000 people will have dementia. We need answers on this issue. I agree with the Minister of State that changes are needed but what changes are proposed? While it is good the Minister of State is in the Chamber, the detail she provided is very sketchy. We know what we need to do and we want to know what the Department of Health and Minister intend to do. How much money will be provided and where will we see progress for people with dementia and their overburdened carers?

Deputy Catherine Byrne: It is National Carers Week and I compliment the people who, in their communities and homes, look after people with all kinds of conditions. This gives them

an opportunity to stay in their homes, live in their communities and play a part in family life. It is important to acknowledge the work being done, especially as it is National Carers Week.

I cannot give the Senator any commitment on the budget, and nor could the Minister of State, Deputy Daly, if he was responding. The budget is in the process of being put together for October. I am sure the Minister for Finance, Deputy Paschal Donohoe, and the Minister of State, Deputy Daly, will have many meetings about the budgets for all the services, particularly services for older people.

I do not have specific answers to some of the Senator's questions, but I will follow up on them for her. I assure her that the Minister of State, Deputy Daly, and the Government are committed to helping people with dementia to continue to live at home, with supports around them. This is what we all want, whether we are in government or opposition. We all want to support as many people as possible. I do not have figures on the budget and probably will not have them for some time. I will relay the Senator's concerns to the Minister of State, who unfortunately is not here to provide some of the finer details, which I do not have. I will ask his office to reply specifically to the Senator.

Services for People with Disabilities

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: Earlier this month, the Government announced funding of €16 million for 27 projects across the State, to be funded under the Ability programme. This programme provides supports to more than 2,600 young people aged between 15 and 29 years who have a disability. According to a Government press statement, the announcement was the fruition of a long period of planning, consultation and assessment by various Departments and Pobal. Initially it was planned to allocate €10 million in funding. This was subsequently increased to €16 million, supporting all 27 projects. I welcomed that increase.

One of the groups that applied for funding was a partnership consisting of the Bluestack Special Needs Foundation based in Donegal town, Inishowen Children's Autism Related Education Limited, which covers the Inishowen Peninsula but also provides services to the wider Donegal area, and Extern. They came together in a partnership and they were one of the groups turned down for funding. iCare met Oireachtas Members in recent days and it has given us this map and put it online. It is a scandal that there are 27 projects, not one of which is north of Roscommon or Dublin. In my part of the world in Donegal, people are sick and tired of looking at maps like this when it comes to a range of health services, but these are disability services.

iCare is based in my home area of Inishowen and has been going for 18 years. It has had to raise every single cent it spends. It started off with six families and today it provides services to 105 persons with disabilities and their families. It delivers a huge service solely from fund-raising. It has been turned down for funding only to discover, when looking to see where the money went, that nothing went north of Roscommon or Dublin. That is not to begrudge any of the organisations that got funding. I believe every single one of them deserved to get funding, but how can this be called a State-wide service for young people with disabilities when so many counties are missing? I am particularly angry about Donegal because we are isolated and we are denied access to health services in so many ways. So many of these maps are a line between Galway and Dublin, north of which nothing is provided to us.

I am asking that both the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Deputy

Regina Doherty, and the Minister of State with special responsibility for disability issues, Deputy Finian McGrath, urgently review this. After all, in their own press statements they have acknowledged that they have increased the originally planned €10 million to €16 million. They need to increase it further. They need to make sure that no young person, whether they are in Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan or Louth, is denied the equality of access and opportunity with which other young people with disabilities throughout the country are rightly provided.

This needs urgently to be reviewed. It is scandalous that two Departments, working with Pobal, in whose statements it says it has put extensive preparation into this, have allowed young people with disabilities in such a huge area to be left neglected and abandoned again. We will not stand for it and we demand a review and a reversal of the decision to limit the funding to €16 million. That is my call here today and I can tell the Minister of State that since this map has gone up on social media, it has gone viral. People are furious in my part of the world. The Minister needs to review this urgently and make sure the funding is provided. If not, there will be a battle on the Government's hands.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I thank Senator Mac Lochlainn for his Commencement matter. I will be taking this question of behalf of the Minister of State with special responsibility for disability issues, Deputy Finian McGrath, who is, unfortunately, out of the country at present.

The Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Deputy Regina Doherty, together with the Minister of State, recently announced funding of €16 million to deliver a new pre-activation programme for young people with disabilities called Ability. The Ability programme provides supports to in excess of 2,600 young people with disabilities and who are aged between 15 and 29 years old. The programme, using a range of person-centred supports, will promote employment prospects and meaningful social roles for young people with disabilities, in particular, young people who are distant from the labour market. The initiative is being funded by the Exchequer and the EU under the European Social Fund, ESF, as part of the ESF programme for employability, inclusion and learning for 2014 to 2020. It demonstrates the commitment, at both a Governmental and EU level, to support and assist young people with disabilities to achieve their individual employment and other goals.

The announcement brought to fruition the result of a long period of planning, consultation and assessment for the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and its partner Pobal. Pobal has been contracted by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection to manage the application and evaluation process for the proposals received under the measures. Pobal put considerable resources into providing information resources for potential applications, including several regional seminars such as one held in Cavan. Following an extensive information campaign and application process, the Ability programme attracted applications from 57 projects. A detailed and independent assessment process of these 57 applications was undertaken by Pobal. Pobal awarded scores out of 100 for all the applications. Scores were assigned to each proposal based on a weighted marking system linked with the scheme's evaluation criteria as follows: meeting the programme measure priorities; need for the proposals; capacity of the organisation; and value for money. The first criteria attracted 40% of the marks while the other criteria attracted 20% each. Only projects receiving a score of 60 or above were deemed by Pobal to be of sufficiently high standard to be recommended for funding at the time. On this basis, Pobal recommended 27 projects as suitable for funding. These recommendations were accepted because they were made by Pobal on the basis of these objective criteria. Neither the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Deputy

Regina Doherty, nor the Minister of State, Deputy Finian McGrath, had any role to play in this completely independent assessment process.

At the time of the launch of the measure it was expected that funding for the programme would amount to €10 million over a three-year period. However, given the number and quality of the proposals received, enhanced funding arrangements have been put in place in the amount of €16 million to support all 27 projects recommended for funding by Pobal.

Pobal and the Ability programme have an appeals process for applicants or grant-holders who believe that decisions taken and procedures followed by Pobal in the administration of funding have not been applied fairly or consistently. The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, through its Intreo service and the EmployAbility service, continues to offer national supports and services to people with disabilities who wish to pursue their employment ambitions. Pobal is currently in the process of drawing up and putting in place funding agreements with the 27 projects or organisations. Once these are in place the 27 projects will commence the delivery of services and supports for more than 2,600 young people with disabilities who have been identified as people who will benefit from the new programme. I will come back to the Senator with any further queries.

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: I do not dispute that this was an independent process, but it was an entirely flawed process. Two Departments worked with Pobal, which is responsible for assisting communities in tackling poverty and improving inclusion throughout the State. I cannot understand how, following an extensive process, they could come up with the map I have before me. The map shows that no organisations north of Roscommon and Dublin were given any funding. It is absolutely shocking. I cannot understand how the Departments and Pobal could not have worked better.

In Donegal, organisations such as iCARE and the Bluestack Special Needs Foundation work with young people with special needs, as does Extern. All these are impressive and trusted organisations. How on earth could they not have been assisted to ensure that their projects fitted the criteria appropriately? It is beyond me.

It is absolutely indefensible for the Government to stand over a national EU co-funded measure that results in a map with such huge gaps. The Minister of State should immediately review the process and go back to the organisations in those counties that have been left behind.

I am here to speak about my home county of Donegal. I am absolutely outraged because I know the relevant organisations. The Minister of State, Deputy Finian McGrath, knows about iCARE because he met those involved last November. He knows that the organisation is about to go to the wall, along with many of its services. That means the 105 young people iCARE has supported cannot be supported in the same way from now on. It gets no money from the Government and now has received this kick in the teeth.

We are told that independent criteria were applied. People's heads were torn apart with the bureaucracy. Where is the humanity in a decision like that which leaves so many young people with disabilities behind across a huge swathe of this country? It is indefensible. The process is flawed. It needs to be reviewed and the Government must reverse the approach it has taken. It must do right by young people with disabilities in my county of Donegal and all of these counties. The same counties are always let behind.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: While listening to the Senator's concerns and anger I have

taken some notes. There is an appeals process and I do not know whether the organisations the Senator speaks about went through the appeal process. It may not be for me to say that.

Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: The process is flawed. That is the point. There is no point appealing a process that is flawed.

Deputy Catherine Byrne: I can only give the reply that I have in front of me. Unfortunately the Minister of State with responsibility for people with disabilities cannot be here to listen to the Senator's concerns. I will relate them to him.

I do not believe that we as Ministers should have an influence on decisions made by different groups around the country. I know the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Deputy Regina Doherty, and the Minister of State with responsibility for people with disabilities, Deputy Finian McGrath, would agree with me. There are criteria and they were stated in the reply. I do not know why some of the organisations the Senator speaks about did not get money. I can understand visually from the map that some places or organisations have not received funding. Maybe there are flaws in the process, I do not know. If there was something wrong with their applications it may have helped if they had been assisted in some way. I will bring the Senator's concerns and his anger - because I can see he is angry about this - back to the Minister and the Minister of State and ask them to look at the map, and speak to Pobal to see if there is any way it can consider an appeals process, particularly for the projects the Senator has been speaking about. It would be helpful if he could send me the map.

Sitting suspended at 3.22 p.m. and resumed at 3.35 p.m.

Order of Business

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The Order of Business is No. 1, the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016 - Report Stage to be taken at 4.45 p.m. and to adjourn not later than 6 p.m.; No. 2, statements on marine spatial planning, to be taken at 6 p.m. and to adjourn not later than 7 p.m., with the contribution of group spokespersons not to exceed eight minutes, and all other Senators not to exceed five minutes and; No. 3, statements on tourism, to be taken at 7 p.m., with the contributions of group spokespersons not to exceed eight minutes and those of all other Senators not to exceed five minutes.

Senator Catherine Ardagh: Today, I wish to raise two issues. The first relates to the cervical smear interim report. I am very disappointed to learn that we are not being presented with a final report at this stage or in the very near future. I wish to ask the Minister whether Dr. Scally was given adequate resources to complete the report on time and if there is a particular reason we will not have a final report in the very near future.

Another issue that has given rise to the need for me to ask a few questions is the €2,000 *ex gratia* payment that is being made to allow those women who have experienced delays in their diagnosis to uncover the truth and, as the Minister said, to give them a voice. Many colleagues in here are legal professionals and we know that it takes a High Court action to uncover the truth and to allow for the discovery of documents by way of litigation. We know that in medical negligence cases alone one cannot actually issue proceedings unless one has a medical negligence report commissioned by a doctor. Unfortunately, doctors in Ireland are slow to draft medical negligence reports on their colleagues so quite often we have to go to the UK to seek medical negligence reports. Those reports alone are very expensive and cost in the region of €1,500 to €2,000. One cannot issue proceedings without a report. In addition, one cannot bring

a motion for discovery without having issued proceedings. For any of those women to get to the truth and to get a copy of their file from Quest Diagnostics they will need to issue proceedings in the High Court. The outlay alone, not taking into consideration solicitor's fees, will be in or around €1,000. Once proceedings are issued there are costs attached to getting motions, appearances and defences and then one has the court stamp for the discovery motion. The sum of €2,000 simply would not cover the outlay required. Many solicitors are dealing with matters on a *pro bono* basis or on a no foal, no fee basis so I am very disappointed that this amount was mentioned. The Government should itself seek the documents from Quest Diagnostics and commission professional negligence reports for each of the women who have had a delayed diagnosis. It is not enough to give them €2,000 each and tell them to go off and do it themselves. This is what the interim report should do. It should be finding out the truth and it is scandalous that it is not doing so.

The second issue I raise relates to housing and homelessness. In March, we saw an increase of 53 people on the Department's figures. While April showed a slight drop, we know that today there are 5,963 adults and 3,689 children in emergency accommodation. We are lucky the recent nights have been warm, because if the weather were cold, we would see the absolute devastation caused by this crisis. As a solicitor practising in conveyancing, I am disturbed and disgusted by the frenzied and ridiculous escalation in house prices and in the rate of houses changing hands in Dublin in the past few weeks. Homes are no longer affordable in this city and are only within the reach of those with huge incomes and inherited wealth.

I started practising in 2011 after the last property crash. Since 2011, I have seen nothing like the frenzy going on now and the huge increases in house prices in the city. It is only getting worse and we are without doubt heading towards another property bubble. Gazumping has started again and house prices are back at boom-time levels. I have raised this issue 100 times in the House, but, ultimately, we know that without supply in the market, we will continue to see ridiculous house prices.

Eileen Gleeson, director of the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive, has rightly criticised the income bands for housing assistance payments, HAP. Ms Gleeson says that the bands which are currently in force are keeping people in homelessness and must be changed. For example, families who might be willing to leave hotels, hostels and bed and breakfast accommodation to move outside Dublin city are staying put because they fall outside the income bands applying in areas outside Dublin. There is also an issue regarding the rate at which HAP is paid. Anecdotally, we are aware that many households have had to top up their HAP to stay in their chosen residential accommodation. An RTB report published today shows that there will be no abatement in the increase in rent prices. There is serious apathy here and nothing is being done to address the housing market and supply. We are in a deep crisis.

Senator Victor Boyhan: Like the Leas-Chathaoirleach, I have just come from the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly which has been in session for the past two or three days. One of the matters discussed over the weekend was the whole issue of spatial planning. I raised in particular at the assembly the matter of marine spatial planning and indicated to the members from the various jurisdictions that this very day in the Seanad we would have a presentation on that topic. I thank the Leader for organising the debate at relatively short notice, it having been requested only the week before last. Marine spatial planning is very important and presents a real opportunity for us to work in close co-operation and in synergy with the authorities and local councils in Northern Ireland. Fishing boundaries are not fixed at particular points and there are a whole range of issues to discuss regarding oceans and the marine. While we will have

a greater debate on this later, I thank the Leader again for organising that debate this evening.

I turn to the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016, on which we had a great discussion recently. We have to maintain our focus. As a result of the revelations a few weeks ago in this context, which I will not rehearse here, it is clear that people want an absolute right to know their forename, surname, where they were born and what their history has been. The Bill is an important one and we should not lose focus regarding it. I ask the Leader to come back to the House in the coming days to provide Members with an update on the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2016 and how it will be progressed. We should not be deviated from addressing it. The Minister is committed to enacting the legislation notwithstanding the fact that there are issues. I would like to hear more about it.

Senator Ardagh referred to the data and it is clear that we have a serious housing and homelessness crisis. While things are being done, they cannot happen fast enough. That is the problem for everyone. The time has come for an independent body to validate the housing figures. There are 31 local authorities providing different figures on which the Minister relies. We have the homeless executive and other agencies dealing with housing and homelessness. We have to work off one standard matrix database. There is now a case to be made to have independently validated housing figures from which we can all work for all 31 local authorities. Nobody has a monopoly on the issues of housing and homelessness in terms of policy. We are all committed across the Houses to do something about it. If we have a greater understanding of the exact figures, which would be independently validated, it may help us in these debates.

Senator Rose Conway-Walsh: I welcome the decision by the Government to appeal the case of the hooded men. I acknowledge and thank all Senators for their unanimous support for the Seanad motion which called on the Government to appeal this judgment at the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights. It is vitally important.

I thank the men and their legal team for coming to share their story in Leinster House. They have been fighting this case for 50 years. I thank the Government for that move. It is vitally important we had this window of opportunity and that their campaign for truth and justice, which has gone on for decades, will now continue. Will the Government remain fully engaged with the men themselves, as well as their legal representatives, in bringing this appeal forward? The appeal will now be heard by a panel of five judges and will continue from there. I want to acknowledge everybody's support in this matter, including the Leas-Chathaoirleach. I also acknowledge the hard work of my colleague, Senator Ó Donnghaile, in facilitating the men and their families in coming to Leinster House. It shows the value of having Senators from the North in this Chamber - we also have Senator Marshall. There is a real value in having a 32-county approach to what we do in this Chamber.

The misdiagnosis of at least 49 children by audiology services in the west is scandalous. For many of them, it has resulted in profound hearing problems and other associated problems. There needs to be answers. I welcome the fact that the families have now got the report. However, it is disgusting it was leaked to the media first and that the HSE did not make sure it was discussed with the families affected before that. Will the Leader ask the Minister to come to the House to discuss these reports and what will be done to right the wrong done to these children? It is not only 49 children affected. I have been contacted by parents since who had been told all along there was no problem with their children's hearing but have discovered in the past 18 months that there is a problem. I do not believe the 49 constitutes the full enormity of what has gone on. I expect more cases to be revealed as time goes on.

I welcome the health committee report on sodium valproate, a medication given to pregnant mothers. There is a direct correlation between it and children born with disabilities. I have raised the matter in the House before. The Leader has said it is time the Minister came in to discuss this matter. Now that this report has been completed, it is important we have a full debate in the Chamber so we can work through its recommendations and put a plan in place.

Senator Ivana Bacik: I commend all those involved in the wonderful ceremony last week, Dublin Honours Magdalenes. It was uplifting to see it after such shabby treatment of so many women for so long by the State, other institutions and, in many cases, by individual families. It was good and positive to see such a great welcome for the Magdalenes by Dublin's Lord Mayor, as well as other aspects of civic and official society. I also commend the President, Michael D. Higgins, for hosting a reception in Áras an Uachtaráin.

I join Senator Ardagh in expressing concern about the delay in the report of the scoping inquiry into CervicalCheck. The report today appears to address only one point in the terms of reference. A full report is now not likely until the autumn, and certainly not by the end of June as it was supposed to be. My colleague, Deputy Kelly, has raised in the Dáil the issue of the continued lack of information being provided to many of the women affected who have still not received their personal medical records. Clearly, greater urgency needs to be given to this matter and I hope we can see that. I ask the Leader to pass that on to the Minister for Health.

In respect of another aspect of women's health, however, I commend the Minister for Health and the Taoiseach on moving swiftly to address issues that have arisen over the weekend regarding the legislation to give effect to the wishes of the people who voted in the referendum 66% in favour of repealing the eighth amendment. The Minister and the Taoiseach are quite right to point out that while there will be a conscientious objection clause in the legislation - that was in the heads of Bill published in March - clearly there will still be a duty to refer onwards and doctors cannot deny women access to medical care that they so clearly require.

We should also be looking for the Joint Committee on Health to conduct hearings, as I think it will, on how we can adopt a best practice model of health service provision in this area. Now we have an opportunity to get our legislation right. The heads of the Bill are strong and positive, and people were aware of those when they voted "Yes" on 25 May. It would be useful for the committee to hold hearings with, for example, experts from the World Health Organization, WHO, as well as with Irish GPs and members of the Institute of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. I have written to the Minister on behalf of Women's Health in Ireland, a cross-party, cross-political and cross-professional grouping, to ask that the Chair of the Joint Committee on Health, Deputy Harty, would conduct such hearings, and I hope we will do that.

This week is national bike week, and I wish all colleagues a happy national bike week. I very much hope we will see in Leinster House greater provision for cyclists. There has been a somewhat grudging provision of facilities for cyclists in these Houses and it is something I, as a daily all-weather cyclist, have been meaning to raise more often. I am delighted to be meeting the Superintendent of the Houses and others tomorrow to look at how we can improve provision of, in particular, parking facilities for bikes. We need Leinster House to lead the way in encouraging people to cycle to work. In Dublin, there are low numbers of people cycling and a terrible provision of cycle paths and cycling infrastructure. There is much in literature now about building velotopia - a utopia for bikes - or cities in which cycling is given priority and in which citizens are encouraged to cycle. We could lead on that in Leinster House.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: We will need to make the roads safe first.

Senator Ivana Bacik: Unfortunately, we are in more of a motopia at present. It is the car that is given priority in far too many instances in the cities and towns around Ireland. Let us lead the way in creating a velotopia. I, again, wish everyone a happy national bike week. I look forward to a stronger and more positive endorsement of cycling within Leinster House as well as elsewhere.

Senator James Reilly: I echo the sentiment of the previous speaker on cycling which clearly has tremendous benefits, both environmentally and to the individual in terms of exercise. There is a dearth of safe places to cycle.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Is the Senator saying I should be doing more of it?

Senator Ivana Bacik: We all should.

Senator James Reilly: Would I be so impertinent?

Senator Jerry Buttmer: We all should do more.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Leader is right.

Senator James Reilly: I raise a serious matter regarding the housing crisis, which others have mentioned and which the Government is using all its resources to address. The building of many houses has now started. We would like to see that accelerated. One of the places where a lot of development will take place, because this is where most of the land available to us is, is in Fingal in north Dublin. It has thousands of acres zoned and is well positioned to accommodate this housing need. Planning permissions have been granted for badly needed houses, some of which are being built in the popular town of Skerries. We now have a situation, however, where people have paid up to €500,000 for a new house and find they have no reliable water supply, and I met some of the residents yesterday. There is regularly no water supply at all. It is a sick joke. I use the word "sick" because it is a real health risk. One gentleman is married to another public servant and they have a nice new home. He is delighted to have a future for himself, his wife and young family. They have four children, the youngest of whom is four weeks old. They have had no water supply for seven days in a new house. Another lady whom I have met is undergoing chemotherapy on a regular basis. She has to undergo it again tomorrow. There is also no running water in her house. If she gets an infection, we all understand the catastrophic consequences for her. Another lady without a water supply has a five year old and a three year old. Pensioners are expected to climb into their attics to check that their water tanks are filling. It is ludicrous.

Where is the planning by Irish Water? Does it not know where new houses are being planned or where permission has been granted? Can it not see new houses going up? These newer and many older estates in Skerries are badly affected by a very poor water supply or have no water supply at all. There have been 20 outages in the past 18 months, more than one day per month. In modern Ireland it is a regular occurrence not to have a water supply. New houses have burnt out pumps because people who are out working do not realise there is no water supply. Their homes are being damaged as a result. I ask the Leas-Chathaoirleach to picture a situation where his son or daughter who has worked really hard to save to buy his or her new home in which he or she is living with a young family is sitting in it without a water supply. They cannot even provide the basics of modern life - clean water and a clean environment for

their children in which to grow. Irish Water needs to pull up its socks. It is at a crossroads, but it can build a reputation like that of the ESB, of which we are so proud because it rarely lets us down and is admired internationally, or it can be like other organisations which I will not mention, the credibility of which is stretched daily in the public's mind. How will excellent builders who have stayed in business and are building new houses stay in business if they cannot even guarantee prospective customers a water supply in their new homes? This has ramifications across society.

I brought with me a picture of a resident shown in yesterday's edition of the *Irish Independent*. Is this modern Ireland - in 2018 having to carry water to one's home on one's head? That is totally unacceptable to the people. Will the Leader bring the Minister to the House to explain how he will ensure Irish Water is fit for purpose and outline the capital investment plan for the next three years? I call on Irish Water to address immediately the utterly unacceptable situation in Skerries where families have literally been left high and dry without a water supply for days on end. If it has to do so, let there be temporary local water reservoirs, as in the case of foul sewers, or let it upgrade the pumping system to provide water in all parts of Skerries.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Senator is well over time.

Senator James Reilly: The last thing I want to hear from Irish Water is that it will allow this problem to spread to the other towns and villages of Fingal-----

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Point taken.

Senator James Reilly: -----including Rush, Loughshinny, Lusk and even Balbriggan. I ask for the Minister to be brought to the House to explain how he will ensure Irish Water is made fit for purpose. I say to Irish Water that it should not take a public outcry over many days and the media to get it to come to turn the water back on. If that is from where it is starting, the end is nigh for it.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I second Senator Rose Conway-Walsh's proposal that the Minister for Health be brought to the House, with particular reference to the report on valproate, a drug women were taking during pregnancy. It is important that the Minister explain the position because many women have been affected.

I need to raise an important issue that is being raised by many. We have all become involved in what I can only describe as the passport debacle. I have received hundreds of calls, letters and messages about problems encountered in obtaining passports. There are people
4 o'clock who have to travel for emergencies who are run ragged in having to travel to Dublin from all corners of the country because there is no printer in Cork.

To get a passport, someone must come to Dublin. Some people applied ten or 12 weeks ago, so it is not as if they are not applying in time. One woman applied on behalf of her entire family ten weeks ago ahead of their first ever trip abroad. Although their first-time applications were all sent together, she has only received two passports to date - one for her husband and the other for one of her twin sons. What procedure was followed to lead to such an outcome?

Why is the Passport Office telling people to apply in good time and use the passport express service only to smash its promise on return times? People are not getting their passports in time. There has been a spike in applications for various reasons, including a growing population, more disposable income and Brexit, but surely we planned for this when we asked the

Passport Office to hire more staff for the peak season.

Like many Senators, I travel to Dublin with constituents every year to try to get them the passports to which they are entitled. This happens all year round, not just during the summer. Lately, Senators have been inundated because of the large backlog. I want the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to tell the House exactly why it can take up to 12 weeks, if not more, to get a passport. Is it that the office needs more staff or another printer?

Senator Jerry Buttimer: This was dealt with as a Commencement matter today.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Yes.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I know, but it is serious.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Did the Senator not listen to that debate?

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: No.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: If the Senator had, she would not be raising it now.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: The Minister needs to attend the House. We have a very-----

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Minister of State, Deputy Halligan, was present.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I was at a meeting of the Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government. We have so many meetings. Bring the Minister of State back in.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Senator can propose that this be taken as another Commencement matter.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: We need to sort this out. We have a system that is failing. People have a constitutional right to a passport.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The Minister of State was in the Chamber.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I want the Minister of State to attend the House.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: He was here.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I was at other meetings. I call on the Minister of State to return. This has to do with passports.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Point taken.

Senator Gabrielle McFadden: I second Senator Bacik's comments on Dublin Honours Magdalenes. It was a fitting tribute to the ladies. I commend everyone involved, particularly the Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Flanagan, whose office facilitated the invitations.

For Senator Murnane O'Connor's information, if someone applies for a passport online, he or she can get it within seven days. My husband did that last week.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: That is not true.

Senator Gabrielle McFadden: It is true.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I have constituents' applications-----

Senator Gabrielle McFadden: The money went out of our account on 29 May and the passport arrived in the post last Thursday. It was done online.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I have people whose applications for new passports are still in the system.

Senator Gabrielle McFadden: I welcome the Government's announcement last week of €4 billion for Project Ireland 2040. I was interested in how Members in this House and the Lower House called Project Ireland 2040 a glossy brochure with nothing behind it. The Government has put its money where its mouth is with this announcement. Of particular interest is the €2 billion for urban regeneration. For some time, I have been working on a proposal to revive the west side of Athlone for business and accommodation. My project fits perfectly with this scheme. There has been considerable development in Athlone, but parts of its west side have been left behind. Last week, I held a public meeting in Athlone at which I got fantastic support from businesses and residents.

Will the Leader ask the Minister to attend the House to discuss such projects, the details of which will be announced this month, and their timelines? It is important that people get behind them and that community-based regeneration projects work with county councils to acquire funding. The Minister could discuss with us the application criteria for grants and the timelines for applications.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: There is a lot of money promised, but what will be delivered?

Senator Gabrielle McFadden: A Leas-Chathaoirleach,-----

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: The Minister will not deliver on many of those promises.

Senator Jerry Buttiner: Is the Senator giving the Minister-----

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: Those are all just promises.

(Interruptions).

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Order, please. Senator Murnane O'Connor, please behave. I call on the Leader to respond to the Order of Business.

Senator Jerry Buttiner: I welcome Laura, June and Rob Cleeve from Canada. Laura is interning in Senator Richmond's office. I hope that they have a pleasant stay. They are welcome visitors to our country.

I welcome Senators back from their sojourns over the break and hope that they will have a productive term. I thank Members for their contributions to the Order of Business. I thank Members who raised the cervical cancer screening inquiry, the Scally inquiry. Can we put the matter in perspective? Let us try to not politicise this issue and make it a political football.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I think that is quite funny.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: It is not funny at all.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: The Leader is making too many promises.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Order, the Leader to respond without interruption.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: It is about ensuring that we get the information and the facts for the women and their families.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: That is absolutely right.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: That is why the Government set up the Scally inquiry. Let me reiterate that I have only one objective, as has the Government, which is to get the full facts in this case.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: Everybody wants that. That is not the problem. Everybody wants the proper information. I agree with that.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: The Scally inquiry was established and it was always accepted that an interim report would be published. The report was published on time yesterday. Extra time has been given at the request of Dr. Scally. The fact that Dr. Scally asked for more time shows that this inquiry is a complex and detailed one that requires thorough investigation. It also underlines the value of the independent investigation. Yesterday, the Minister for Health accepted all six recommendations contained in the report.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: Well done. I appreciate what the Minister has done.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Senator is out of order. The Leader, without interruption.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Let me clarify a point for Senator Ardagh. The initial payment of €2,000 is not a bar on further payments. I agree with the Senator that any request for further information or for records must be dealt with as a matter of urgency and must be a priority. Those of us who have worked in hospitals and who know something about medical records know it is not about going into file or clicking a switch. It is much more detailed than that. I hope people understand that the interim report has been published. As the Taoiseach said in the House today and as the Minister for Health said, it is important we get all the information. To clarify further, the €2,000 payment will be on top of any redress payment. It is an immediate assistance payment and separate from the Government commitment to a redress payment.

It is important we look at Dr. Scally's first report and recognise that the provision of information to women is comparable with that available elsewhere and in some respects it is better. It is critical that we get all the information for the women and the families involved.

Senator Ardagh also raised the issue of housing. It was a bit unfair of her to say nothing is happening in that regard. She should be looking at what we are achieving. The Government has five basic housing goals, which are to supply more homes; to supply more social housing; to supply more affordable homes; to protect tenants and landlords; and to prevent and reduce homelessness. We all accept that we have a housing issue but the way forward is to increase the supply of housing. I ask Members to look at the EUROSTAT figures which show that one in three people in this country is living in an under-occupied dwelling. I think that is an interesting statistic. We will have a further debate on housing. Under Rebuilding Ireland, the Government

is committed to a plan to construct a minimum of 25,000 houses. There has been an increase of 27% in planning permissions since 2016. There has been an increase of 27% in commencement notices since March 2017. ESB connections have increased by 30% in the last 12 months. The Central Bank has forecast that 23,000 new homes will be built this year and a further 27,000 will be built in 2019. Registrations increased by 41% in the 12 months from March 2017 to March 2018. Building regulation figures show that 2,367 houses were built in the first three months of this year, which represents an increase of 45% on the figure for the first quarter of 2017. The number of people employed in the construction industry has increased by 14%.

Notwithstanding some of the figures, I accept the point that Senator Boyhan has rightly made, which is that it could be time for an independent housing validation body. I would certainly support that. Such a body, like the CSO, would end the acrimony and political gamesmanship that surrounds these issues. I fully concur with Senator Ardagh that Eileen Gleeson's comments should be treated with absolute sincerity and seriousness.

I thank Senator Boyhan for his comments on the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. I welcome him and the Leas-Chathaoirleach back. He made an honourable request for statements on the marine spatial strategy. I am happy that such a debate is taking place this week. As the Senator said, we need to have more discussions on our marine life. We need to take full cognisance of it as an important element of our discussions.

I join Senator Conway-Walsh in welcoming the decision to bring an appeal in the case of the hooded men. I hope it will bring about a positive conclusion.

Senator Conway-Walsh also spoke about sodium valproate, which is an anti-convulsant drug. General practitioners and other doctors have been given advice on this drug. It is important for us to get answers in this regard.

I thank Senator Conway-Walsh for raising the issue of audiology services in the west. It is important for the 49 children and families who have been left in a vulnerable position to get answers in respect of this matter.

Senators Bacik and McFadden mentioned last week's Dublin Honours Magdalenes ceremony, which was a fitting tribute to the ladies in question. It was emotional to watch the ovation the women received outside the Mansion House. I thank everyone involved in the matter, including the Minister, Deputy Flanagan, who expanded the redress scheme.

I join Senator Bacik in welcoming the clarification from the Taoiseach and the Minister for Health in respect of the legislation that is being introduced on foot of last month's referendum on the eighth amendment.

I join Senators Bacik and Reilly in wishing every success to everyone who is participating in national bike week. As an important part of our new and modern Ireland, we need to look at how we can make our cities more user-friendly for pedestrians and cyclists. We need to do more work on this. I am aware that Transport Infrastructure Ireland and the National Transport Authority have been involved in creating cycle lanes across many cities. There is a need for such support to continue to be given. When the legislation comes before this House, I am sure we will not obfuscate or prolong the debate.

Senator Reilly raised the difficulties with the water supply to houses in Skerries. I join him in calling for greater planning between Irish Water and local authorities. He mentioned that

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there have been 20 water outages in a particular area, which is totally unacceptable. There is a need for ongoing negotiation and dialogue between Irish Water and the local authority in the Fingal area as a matter of urgency. I know the Senator attempted to raise this issue as a Commencement matter today. He might be successful on another day.

Senator Murnane O'Connor spoke about the Passport Office. I would be happy to give her the reply from the Minister today. I can tell her that in the first four months of this year, the number of applications received increased by 10% compared to the same period last year. This represented an increase of 25% on the equivalent figure for 2016. This is a sure sign that people are travelling, the recession is over and people are feeling more confident again. Notwithstanding that, I want to----

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I think that is missing the point.

Senator Jerry Buttiner: I want to----

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Senator can have a chat with the Leader later.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: People are going to the passport offices----

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Unfortunately----

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: It is not all about holidays----

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Senator knows----

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: That is totally wrong and the Minister of State's reply----

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Senator can hold her view but she cannot express it now, unfortunately.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I will bring the Minister of State to the House again.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Senator is out of order, I am sorry.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: The information was wrong.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Senator can check it out after the debate.

Senator Jerry Buttiner: What information was wrong?

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Please allow the Leader to continue without interruption.

Senator Jerry Buttiner: Which part of the reply was wrong?

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: We cannot have a debate on the matter. The Leader should carry on with his response.

Senator Jerry Buttiner: Passports are very important and issues with them can affect people as they travel for work or leisure. The passport offices work flat out to ensure that applicants' needs are met. A total of 220 extra staff have been employed in the passport offices. There is an unprecedented demand for passports and the Passport Office has taken a number

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of initiatives to address it. The office has shown an ongoing commitment to innovation and reform. I commend the members of staff in the passport offices in Cork and Dublin who do Trojan work.

It is also important to recognise, as Senator McFadden outlined, that there is an online passport service. I used the service and received a passport card in a timely fashion. I also had the pleasure of visiting the Cork passport office where I filled in my information on a machine, sat down and took a number to wait. I was interviewed within half an hour, after which I filled out the necessary paperwork and received my passport in jig time. This was done for me without fuss after I walked in off the street.

While I accept that there are people who have difficulties with passports, we must commend the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Simon Coveney, and the staff in his office on the work they do in ensuring people are facilitated when emergencies arise and they need to travel for medical or humanitarian reasons. It is unacceptable for a Senator to engage in grand-standing on this issue.

The backlog in processing passports is being addressed. I reiterate for the Senator, who perhaps does not want to hear good news, that 220 extra staff are employed in the passport offices. It is important to recognise that demand for passports is increasing. The number of passport applications received in the first four months of 2018 was 10% higher than in the same period last year and 25% higher than in the same period two years ago. I accept that we need to do more but let us not play politics with the issue. A great deal of work is being done.

Senator Gabrielle McFadden raised the important issue of Project Ireland 2040 and the €4 billion funding commitment. This is a sign of the Government's ongoing commitment to the revitalisation of the State.

I thank Members for their contributions. As the summer recess approaches, I look forward to five productive weeks in the Houses. Much work remains to be done and there will be some late nights. I thank Members and staff and look forward to everyone's co-operation during the next five weeks.

Order of Business agreed to.

Sitting suspended at 4.20 p.m. and resumed at 4.50 p.m.

Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016: Report Stage

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I welcome the Minister of State. A recommittal is necessary in respect of the first group of amendments comprising amendments Nos. 1 and 55 to 65, inclusive, as they do not arise out of committee proceedings. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Bill recommitted in respect of amendment No. 1.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Amendments Nos. 1 and 55 to 65, inclusive, are related and may be discussed together by agreement.

Government amendment No. 1:

In page 5, lines 14 and 15, to delete "and to provide for connected matters" and substitute the following:

“; to amend the Derelict Sites Act 1990; to give effect to Directive 2014/89/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 July 2014 establishing a framework for marine spatial planning; and to provide for matters connected therewith”.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): Amendment No. 1 is a simple technical amendment to incorporate a reference in the Long Title of the Bill to marine spatial planning, which is the subject also of amendments Nos. 55 to 65, inclusive. The amendment to the Long Title also incorporates a new reference to the Derelict Sites Act, which is also the subject of a subsequent Government amendment.

Amendments Nos. 55 to 65, inclusive, provide for the insertion of a new Part of the Bill and, ultimately, a new stand-alone provision in the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, to provide a primary legislative basis for marine spatial planning. While SI 352 of 2016, the European Union (Framework for Maritime Spatial Planning) Regulations 2016, already provides for the formal transposition of Directive 2014/89 EU, the EU’s marine spatial planning directive, there is a clear need to provide for a primary legislative underpinning for the marine spatial plan which mirrors the new provisions for the national planning framework currently set out in section 8 of the Bill, as drafted.

These amendments have two broad objectives. The first is to repeal SI 352 of 2016 and replace it with new primary legislation giving effect to the requirements of the marine spatial planning directive. The second objective is to introduce new arrangements on governance, public participation, review and Oireachtas involvement in the plan-making process to ensure that the processes for adopting Ireland’s two long-term forward spatial plans, marine and terrestrial, respectively, are consistent and fully aligned.

The development of a marine spatial plan is a requirement under the EU marine spatial planning directive, which establishes a framework for marine spatial planning. Marine spatial planning is defined as a process by which the relevant member state authorities analyse and organise human activities in marine areas to achieve ecological, economic and social objectives. The directive details the main goals and minimum requirements for member states as follows: balanced and sustainable territorial development of marine waters and coastal zones; optimised development of maritime activities and the business climate; better adaptation to risks; and resource-efficient and integrated coastal and maritime development. The creation of an overarching national marine spatial plan is also anticipated in Ireland’s integrated marine plan, Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth, which was published in 2012. The plan identified a marine spatial plan as a Government policy objective.

Under SI 352 of 2016, which initially transposed the marine spatial planning directive, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, which office is now that of Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, was designated as the competent authority for the purposes of co-ordinating the implementation of the directive and, by extension, preparing Ireland’s first maritime spatial plan. This work builds on our Department’s existing role in terrestrial spatial planning. On 12 September 2012, the Government published Towards a Marine Spatial Plan for Ireland - A Roadmap for the Delivery of the National Marine Spatial Plan, which I understand will be discussed later in the House. It is a pity perhaps that we did not take these debates in reverse order, but in any event it is booked in for later on.

The 2012 roadmap sets out the pathway to create a clear framework for marine spatial plan-

ning in parallel with the national planning framework, Project Ireland 2040, otherwise known as the NPF. This process has the potential to deliver a wide range of benefits for Ireland, including: improved certainty and predictability for private investments; improved certainty of obtaining financing for off-shore investments; lower transaction costs for maritime businesses and improved competitiveness for our marine sectors; enhanced environmental management of marine areas; improved use of sea space and the best possible co-existence of uses in coastal zones and marine waters; improved attractiveness of coastal regions; reduced co-ordination costs for coastal authorities; greater development of innovation and research; and enhanced and integrated data and information. My Department has already commenced the preparation of the marine spatial plan, MSP, which will be a strategic special framework encompassing all plans and sectoral policies for the marine area while providing a coherent framework in which those sectoral policies and objectives can be realised. The MSP is intended to become a decision-making tool for regulatory authorities and policy-makers into the future in several ways, including decisions and individual consent applications which will have to have regard to the provisions of the plan in the same way that terrestrial plans form part of a decision-making toolkit in the on-land planning process.

It is intended that the MSP will have a key input to the development of relevant sectoral policies, similar to the role of the national planning framework, in terms of terrestrial sectoral policy development. Development of the MSP will provide an opportunity to set out a strategic planning framework for the period to 2040, in line with the timespan of the national planning framework. It will be both a strategic and concise document in its support of a sustainable development of Ireland's marine resource. This process will be informed by effective public participation across departmental agency structures to ensure maximum buy-in and it must take account of, and inform, the Government's wider efforts to deliver on the objectives set out in harnessing our ocean wealth.

The effect of the amendment is not simply to extend the remit of the terrestrial planning system out to sea. By inserting a new Part into the planning Acts, the Government is giving due recognition to the MSP as the marine equivalent to the national planning framework while also ensuring the process of making the two plans consistent, aligned and clear for all stakeholders.

There is a strong argument in favour of providing legislation for underpinning the two long-term terrestrial and marine plans, the national planning framework and the MSP, respectively, in the same legislative instrument. Accordingly, I hope the House will support these amendments.

Senator Fintan Warfield: Why were we given 24 hours to review 30 amendments which completely alter the shape of the Bill? These changes are represented in amendment No. 1, which involves a Title change, as well as the various changes that will be introduced in the other amendments. If I tried to completely alter a Bill to this extent, I would be laughed out of the Chamber. Senator Grace O'Sullivan might agree with me that marine spatial planning should be in a separate Bill. Why were we given such a short timeframe to consider these amendments and why has the Bill changed to such an extent?

Deputy Damien English: On several occasions in previous debates, I flagged that amendments would be introduced on Report Stage. I am conscious that the Bill has been going through both House for two years. The whole idea of having the two strategies aligned is because we are trying to bring in forward-thinking plans for the next 25 years. It is not the marine plan. It will allow for the legislation. We will have many debates over the next two and half years formalising the MSP. Senators will not be voting on any plan but just on the process.

We had a lengthy discussion around the same process for the national planning framework. Part of the discussion we had in the Seanad was a bit awkward because the legislation came too late and the plan had been adopted. This Bill will put the process for the MSP firmly in legislation. That started last November and will go on for another two years. It is important we have a debate on how we will formulate that plan.

The process itself will be focused on consultation. We touched on this during the previous debate on Senator Grace O'Sullivan's motion. She made the point that very few people turned up to some of the public consultation events. We want more people at them. There will be different stages of consultation as we go through the process. This is putting consultation on a legislative footing as well as the role and involvement of both Houses in finalising the plan by 2019.

Senator Grace O'Sullivan: I echo Senator Warfield's concerns about these amendments being brought in at such short notice.

I recognise that the Minister of State speaks about the national planning framework for which there was plenty of time and huge public engagement. To my mind the marine spatial planning document should be on the same footing with the same support and resources to enable the people of Ireland and the different communities and agencies that would want to contribute to do so. As we know, we are an island nation, we have a huge maritime territory and we have often put it on the back foot. We have an opportunity to get this right this time. I ask that we take time to ensure that we have the best for the people of Ireland.

It is incredible that we are now asked to approve the entire primary legislation framework for marine spatial planning in Ireland, introduced to us on Report Stage of the Bill. If we think in terms of process, this whole Bill has gone through the Dáil. It is now coming to Report Stage in the Seanad and here we are handed a huge amount of amendments. I echo Senator Warfield's concerns with how the Seanad is being lumped with a load of amendments on Report Stage of this legislation. As the Minister of State said, we are scheduled to discuss the marine spatial strategy planning at 6 p.m. this evening so it is like the cart before the horse. We are talking about planning and I am standing here thinking that we are not even getting it right at this stage.

As the Minister of State knows, the Seanad is committed to a high level of protection of the marine environment and has called for the designation of marine parks covering 50% of our waters. We expect that this protection would be included in the provisions being proposed today. Unfortunately this legislation, as being proposed by the Government now, does not refer to or set in train that protection for our marine environment. I want to be able to propose amendments to the Minister of State's proposed text and if these provisions are brought back to us in a separate Bill, I will propose amendments to give effect to the marine parks and marine protected areas that we so badly need.

I also have a fundamental question as to why the Minister of State is proposing to give himself the power of being the competent authority for marine spatial planning. We have an excessively centralised system of government in this country and the Minister of State is seeking to centralise it further. I believe in the value of a decentralised system with the involvement through local government of a wide variety of perspectives and experiences. We set out most of our terrestrial spatial planning policies at county and regional levels. In the case of marine spatial planning the best approach would be to produce and approve these plans at a regional

level. Our regional assemblies have already developed significant expertise in the marine spatial planning area. For example, the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly has produced a strategic management framework for Dublin Bay, the result of a three-year, EU-funded project under the EU LIFE+ programme. It is about consistency in how we do things and I feel the Minister of State has put us on the spot here and, given the area concerned, we should have had more notice and time.

Deputy Damien English: As regards the notice, people can debate that in terms of the processes of the Houses but the whole idea of putting it in here is to do exactly what Senator Grace O'Sullivan is after saying, namely, it gets the recognition of the importance that plan will have. It is putting into legislation the role of both of these Houses and the role Senators will have in that. That consultation has to be there. The process we went through with the national planning framework was honouring the spirit of potential legislation but it did not have to be done. If we do not put it into legislation, Governments of the day, be it this one or the next one, can move on and do the spatial strategy without any involvement here. We are putting it into law that a process has to be undertaken that gives all the involvement the Senator wants.

To me it is giving recognition of its importance that it has to be respected and the marine strategy will have to be developed up through the various levels of consultation involved with the Houses and the committees. It does not have to do so at the moment and the planning framework did not have to either but we did that because we thought it was best policy. This has copper-fastened that best policy and recognised and put the marine strategy on an equal footing with the national planning framework.

I am sorry if the Senator thinks it is short notice. That is a different argument but it is to guarantee a process from here on in because the marine spatial strategy is only being worked on, it is not ready or finished. I chair a working group, we are meeting again tomorrow and it involves all the different stakeholders of all different levels and there will be no limit to the consultation around that. I told the Senator that personally already because I value her input. This legislation guarantees that in case there is a change in Government tomorrow, the next day or down the line. It is a good place to put it and this is the planning Bill to put it into. It recognises the importance of marine spatial planning. That is my reading of it and I hope that we have a chance to then work on the spatial strategy in the years ahead. However, this legislation is not to sign off on the marine spatial strategy, it is copper-fastening its importance and relevance in planning law and that we have to respect that as we develop it over the next couple of years.

Senator Victor Boyhan: I welcome the Minister of State and his officials to the House again. The Minister of State might confirm something for me. I acknowledge that it is the Minister of State's entitlement to propose amendments on this Stage of the Bill. That is a fact and I acknowledge it no matter how disappointed we might be but that is the process we have to operate under. In terms of the marine spatial plan, my understanding is that there is a long way to go, possibly two and a half years. There is a very comprehensive amount of documentation on the Minister of State's website which is where I have got a lot of information about this so I acknowledge that.

The Minister of State might acknowledge that there will have to be a long period of public consultation. I live in a coastal community myself, albeit in south County Dublin in Dún Laoghaire but right across the country, 40% of our population are touching some level of the sea. We should have an understanding that the Minister of State will initiate a substantial period of public consultation and engagement.

It is worth pointing out that there needs to be a coherent coastal and marine plan. That is important and in many ways I would have liked to have seen it as part of the national planning framework but things have moved on. That is the sort of reassurance we want in the House that it is a working document. I welcome that the Minister of State will be here later this evening to talk about it anyway and that there will be this comprehensive engagement with the fishing community, with local and regional councils and authorities and all that are involved. Senator Grace O'Sullivan is right and she has huge expertise in terms of spatial and marine planning. I do not think anyone doubts that. That is the reassurance that the House needs, that this is not a done deal or a *fait accompli* but that there will be a substantial amount of negotiation and public consultation. That is the assurance we need from the Minister of State.

Deputy Damien English: I can absolutely provide that assurance. That is exactly what it is and this legislation is copper-fastening that assurance. Apart from my word, it is in legislation but that is exactly what we want to do and have as many people as we possibly can involved in this public consultation because there are not enough people taking an interest in it.

Senator Kevin Humphreys: I recognise the Minister of State's good intentions. I do not think he is trying to pull a fast one on this. Marine spatial planning is a key function that needs to be embedded in legislation. Senator Grace O'Sullivan touched on Dublin Bay. Most of the beaches in Dublin Bay had a "no bathing" notice during the fine weather for reasons that were pointed out at a very high level at the planning stage of the Spencer Dock sewerage pump station, namely, that if it malfunctioned it would do damage to the bay. That is a large part of the reason there was a no bathing notice in Dublin Bay over the last number of days. That level of engagement in marine spatial planning is necessary. I am a little concerned about the process. The number of amendments the Minister of State proposes to insert in the Bill will provide an enabler facility. The 2016 Bill, which was passed by Dáil Éireann, has been significantly amended and the Minister of State is amending it further by bringing forward more than 30 amendments to it. In the normal course, slight amendments are made to legislation in either of the Houses and it is passed on to the other House. However, if this Bill is passed by Seanad Éireann, it will have been significantly changed from the original Bill that went through the process of Second, Committee and Report Stages in the Dáil. It has gone through Second and Committee Stages in this House and it is now proposed that we significantly change it on Report Stage. I have a concern that it has not been challenged or that the debate on it will not be sufficiently robust at this late date. The Minister of State might provide guidance on the way he intends to deal with the Bill if it is passed by the Seanad. Will it simply be referred from the Seanad to the Dáil or does he intend to refer it to a committee prior to it being taken in the Dáil? There have been significant changes to the Bill, some of which were robustly challenged on Committee Stage in this House and some of which we have only had sight in the past few hours. I can understand the Minister of State wanting to bring this 2016 Bill up to date and reflect what is currently happening. There is a need for the parliamentary process to be carried out to make sure we pass legislation in this House that has been challenged and scrutinised in a proper manner. With the volume of changes the Minister of State is proposing to make to the Bill, I have a concern they may not receive the scrutiny such important legislation requires.

Senator Paudie Coffey: I welcome the Minister of State and his officials to the House to deal with this significant planning legislation. I believe we all want to achieve the same objective in having a coherent and transparent planning system that is properly regulated. The legislation, which we debated at length on Committee Stage, provided for much of what we expected with respect to having a planning regulation and the various mechanisms and powers

that would be afforded to the regulator to ensure we have a planning system in which we can have confidence. However, only a few weeks ago we had a good debate on a motion submitted by Senator Grace O'Sullivan on the need for progress in the way we protect and plan for our marine environment. The Minister of State listened to what was said during that debate. This is a step forward. He has brought forward substantial amendments to provide for marine spatial planning. That is what we sought and what I heard Senators calling for a few weeks ago. The Government was accused, perhaps rightly so, of not moving quickly enough to protect the marine environment and its ecosystem. I commend the Minister of State on bringing forward these amendments. He is mapping out a legislative framework for proper marine spatial planning, which is what we have been calling for. The details of that spatial planning for our marine environment will be worked out once the framework is in place and there will be ample opportunity to engage at all levels.

Senators have pointed out that we are an island nation. I come from a coastal county. It is important all the stakeholders have a say in the proposed plans for our marine environment but unless such planning has statutory underpinning, such as that proposed by the Minister of State, then it is weak. We should commend him on bringing forward these amendments and debate them if we wish. The Minister of State moved quickly and responded to concerns raised in this House only a few weeks ago to the effect that enough was not being done to protect and plan for the future for our marine environment. Substantial amendments have now been brought forward in the Seanad. We should be confident and welcome the fact that we are the first to debate this legislation and the proposed amendments. If we want to change them, the House can vote on them and we can return the Bill, with our changes made to it, to the Dáil.

I welcome that the Minister of State listened to what Members said during a previous debate on this area in the Seanad. He and his officials have mapped out what they want to do in terms of a framework for marine special plans. Substantial amendments have been proposed. Amendments Nos. 55 to 65, inclusive, give statutory powers and underpinning to future plans for the marine that may develop. Rather than divide on these proposed amendments, we should step back and consider what they propose in a positive sense. They will put in place, for the first time ever, statutory plans in legislation for marine spatial planning. I have heard that called for by Members across this House. There is an opportunity for the Seanad to introduce this legislation and make changes to it, and to take the credit for that. I have heard Senators speak passionately about the way we need to plan for our marine environment. This is our opportunity to put such proposals in this legislation, to be proud of them and to change them if we wish, and then to send the legislation back to the Dáil for its further approval. I commend the Minister of State on listening to what was said the Seanad previously and for bringing forward this legislation. It will strengthen planning from territorial planning right across to the marine environment, which is something for which all Senators have been calling for some time.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: We all support marine spatial planning. We all know the importance of regulation and planning but that is not the problem. Many changes have been proposed today that need to be discussed with the different agencies and groups. What Senator Boyhan said is very important. Everybody needs to play a part in this. Everybody wants proper planning and for things to be done right. Many changes have been proposed today and we all need to debate them and to make sure that the agencies involved in this area have a proper say.

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill: I have listened to the debate and I agree fully that marine spatial panning deserves recognition in the Seanad and in the Dáil, and it deserves clarity and a

plan. However, I am concerned, to say the least, at the manner in which this amendment is being introduced. It refers, I believe, to section 7 of the national planning framework and policy objectives 38, 39, 40 41a and 41b, which combine with respect to realising Ireland's island and marine potential. However, it is very short. We speak about public consultation and I heard what the previous speakers said about that. To take a step back from this, the national planning framework is not even being debated line by line in the Houses of the Oireachtas. We are not allowed to vote on it or to have our say. I made a submission as an ordinary citizen in the first round of public consultations and I made one, as did many others, to the second round of public consultations, but I got no feedback. No report was compiled on the first or the second round of public consultations. We are considering a 20-year vision for the future of the country and no report was compiled on those submissions, irrespective of whether they merited consideration. In the final weeks leading up to the publication of the national planning framework, it appeared that political interference dictated the direction of the framework rather than the submissions which were made. That was wrong and we have no opportunity to question it.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Senator has strayed from the amendment before the House. We are dealing with amendment No. 1, which is being taken with amendments Nos. 55 to 65, inclusive.

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill: Yes. I am referring to amendment No. 1 in terms of the national planning framework, and-----

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Only to amendment No. 1.

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill: -----section 7 of it deals with marine spatial planning. There is a complete lack of parliamentary scrutiny of this. I have a later amendment on that and will speak to it when we reach it.

In respect of the marine, this is obviously an amendment to fulfil a European obligation. I have no issue with the amendment but I would like clarification on its objectives. I presume it is to realise the strategic vision set out in the national planning framework. Am I correct, or is there an additional objective of publishing a stand-alone marine spatial plan for the entire country? Will they be unique and separate? At this point I raise a major concern about section 7 related to marine spatial planning and its potential within the national planning framework. Ireland's premier fishing port, Killybegs, is not recognised at all. Smaller ports are given greater recognition. I do not know why that has happened. We cannot now have a say because we are not going to be allowed to debate or vote on the plan. We cannot have a parliamentary buy-in. I have concerns about the entire process, some of which have been raised validly by our colleagues in Sinn Féin. I have listened to Senator Grace O'Sullivan and all of what has been said. This is the future direction of the country over a 20-year period. Politics should be left to one side. Political decisions should be removed and the plan should have an absolute Oireachtas buy-in from all political parties and none. I do not understand the fear about debating its actual merits. We are inserting an amendment of one or two lines into an already confusing Bill. Initially it set out to implement recommendations made in the report of the Mahon tribunal, but now we are encompassing the national planning framework and marine planning. What else are we going to add to the Bill? It appears it started off as a boreen and is now a motorway. It is gaining momentum all the time. Should we not be dealing with these issues separately? Do the national marine spatial strategy and the national planning framework not deserve their own dedicated pathways through the Houses without inserting lines into other Bills?

Deputy Damien English: I am conscious that some Members might have missed the debate earlier. The idea behind the amendments is to recognise the importance of marine spatial planning and that we are putting together a national plan. I am conscious that the Senator might have missed the earlier discussion, but that is exactly what we are doing. We are putting in place a process such that in the coming two years or thereabouts we will formulate a marine spatial plan or a national plan for the marine for the whole country. What the Senator has asked for is exactly what we are doing. What we are trying to include in the legislation is a process to ensure it will involve all of the consultation for which the Senator has called. It is not guaranteed to happen without including it in primary legislation and that is what we are trying to. Others have referenced the process that involves going back to a committee. That was not my plan. My plan was to be here and in the Dáil. Certainly, it is something at which we can look if Senators believe it merits consideration.

To be honest, I think there is confusion about what we are inserting. The marine spatial plan will be debated for two years. We will go through all stages of consultation. The first debate in this House will take place one hour from now. We are starting a process. We published a road map last autumn and the process will continue for a couple of years. I am unsure whether the Senator missed some of the discussion on the national planning framework, but we had many debates in the House on the matter.

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill: I was unable to be here, but I am today, which is why I am discussing the amendments.

Deputy Damien English: I am sorry that the day in question did not suit the Senator.

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill: We have other engagements in the Houses also.

Deputy Damien English: That is fine, but there was considerable discussion in this Chamber, as well as in the Dáil and throughout the country, on the national planning framework. I travelled to meeting after meeting throughout the country and it passed through seven or eight committees. There was a great deal of consultation. The Houses of the Oireachtas gave powers to the committee to finalise the report on behalf of both Houses and it was included.

The Senator is absolutely wrong to say that at the end changes were made based on policy. I have been around the country for two and a half years with the plan and know from where the changes came. They came from the people who made submissions and had ideas. They were brought forward by councillors and many others, including those whom the Senator represents in this House. They included many good changes. The Senator's charge comes because the amendments were announced at the end, but I know from where they came because I tracked the debate throughout the process. I was involved in the consultation process. The same consultation process is involved here. We are actually begging people to get involved in it.

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill: There has been no feedback whatsoever.

Deputy Damien English: Perhaps if the Senator attended some of the debates in the House, he might receive feedback.

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill: No, I am referring to the submissions made.

Deputy Damien English: I am referring to my job, which is to answer to Senators in the House.

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill: It is the responsibility of the Department of the Minister of State.

Deputy Damien English: I have been in this House on many occasions to do so. There has been no shortage of opportunities to discuss the national planning framework and I have been happy to do so.

The difficulty lies where we disagree. I accept that the House disagrees. Senator Fintan Warfield had a reasonable motion seeking a final vote in the Houses. We disagree on that aspect because I believe strongly as a Minister of State in the Department that eventually someone has to bring the debate to an end. That is the job of Ministers and the Government. However, up to that point we can have extensive consultation on a draft, a final draft and feedback from committees. Ultimately, however, someone will have to make the final decision. If that is not allowed for, we will never have a final decision and will still be debating these things for years to come. I accept that we disagree on having a final say. A good argument was made on that point previously, but I could not agree with it. Eventually someone will have to make the final decision.

Senator Grace O'Sullivan should note that it is not a question of my giving me or the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, the power. It is a question of getting all people involved in formulating the national marine strategy. I do not have the final say in the decision-making process that will happen today on a marine or an offshore planning application. Everyone has been involved and made submissions. The Department will make the final judgment after everyone has been consulted and after advice and all written submissions have been received. A specific body is in place to advise on all marine matters. Every group we can think of that wants to have a role in formulating the marine strategy will be involved.

Senator Grace O'Sullivan: That is our right.

Deputy Damien English: I have no problem with it whatsoever because we want involvement. It is a national marine strategy.

This legislation gives the process a legal footing, as well as importance. It is exactly as Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill said about recognising the importance of a national planning framework and a marine strategy. We should recognise that they are equal and equally important, which is why they are included. The legislation is not signing off on what is contained in them. It relates to the process involved in formulating them. It was not in force when we started the national planning framework. We tried to honour its spirit, but it was not apparent. The national marine strategy has a chance to be included if Senators accept and allow it. This House is a fine place in which to make amendments to legislation. However, Senators seem to be downgrading its importance, but I see nothing wrong with starting a debate in this House, bringing something forward and finalising it in the other House. What is wrong with that? Every other day we hear complaints that we do not do that. We are bringing forward amendments that we have flagged and said we would start the process here. It is the choice of Senators whether they want to vote in favour of them. One important part of planning is to have a national marine strategy recognised in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill and the process in its own right. It is included in the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill. The process recognises the equal right accorded to the national planning framework. The Senator is wrong. This legislation, introduced on foot of the report of the Mahon tribunal, is about having a national planning

framework and putting in place a process for it. That is also part of the process arising from the report of the Mahon tribunal, which is why it is included in the Bill. It belongs in it. If a planning Bill is being designed for a period of four or five years and goes through the Houses for a further two years, there are likely to be add-ons because every week Senators raise issues that they want to see included. The legislation is responding to the needs of the country. That is what the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill is for. We are adding things as we go along. There will be another one in the autumn, but I would prefer to provide for the national marine strategy process in this legalisation to get on with it. However, that is a matter for Senators. It is a good move to have a proper process set out to involve everyone in the consultation process for the national marine strategy. It is important for the country that we do so.

Senator Kevin Humphreys: Most Senators are not questioning the work ethic or integrity of the Minister of State on this matter or the level of commitment he has shown in this and the other House on the Bill. However, I have a concern about the process. As Senator Paudie Coffey said, we are all including the framework in the Bill. To me, it represents the foundations. However, we are only including it on Report Stage. In normal circumstances these amendments would have been discussed on Committee Stage in one of the Houses to have a full debate.

I will be honest. I have not had time to look at the number of amendments the Minister of State has included in the Bill. There is a certain degree of nervousness. I respect the good intentions of the Minister of State and take it exactly as he has outlined. However, I am unsure whether this has gone through due process and been subject to the full rigour of Committee Stage in either House. I would be far more comfortable had it unfolded otherwise. I accept that the Minister of State is trying to do the best he can because the Bill has been going through both Houses for a long time and numerous statements have been made on what we want to include in the Bill, as Senator Paudie Coffey said. I think the Minister of State is suggesting at this stage that we accept the amendments in this House, especially those relating to the framework for marine spatial planning, and that he then go back to the Dáil for a full Committee Stage debate. If that is the case, I am inclined to support him on the amendment because I could then see an opportunity to test the framework to ensure it is the best one. It would not be sprung on the Dáil by way of a report from the Seanad. I would have much preferred to have seen the amendments brought forward on Committee Stage. I would have been far more comfortable with the idea that they would be stress-tested here to ensure they were the best possible. However, I have reservations. That is the only reason I am raising questions about the process. I have been in the same position as the Minister of State in terms of tabling Report Stage amendments in the Seanad, but certainly not to today's level.

Deputy Damien English: I am not sure whether procedures allow us to recommit. If they do, I would have no objection. We could then have a discussion - there is probably a timeline for after this Stage's conclusion - on this and tease through the benefits of our strategy and what we are trying to do. If people wanted to table amendments in that context, it would be up to them. I am unsure as to whether we can formally recommit, but it might help Members to tease out what we are doing.

I am happy to relay Senator Humphreys's concerns, but there are no concerns. This measure sets out the process that mirrors the national planning framework. We all agreed with the consultation, but we did not like the end product in terms of the draft, who votes on the final document, etc. We will never agree on that. This measure is not hidden away. I am not saying that it will be removed, as it is firmly there in black and white.

The remainder sets out the same process that we undertook with the national planning framework. We are trying to follow that. Most people agree it was a good process and those who wanted to participate felt involved, but if only five people attend a meeting that we advertise in the local media, newspapers, Twitter, Facebook and so on, what can we do? I am happy to take a list of people whom the Senator wants to invite to these meetings and to go to their neighbourhoods where possible, but we cannot drag them to meetings. We want them to be involved. That will be ensured.

I have no problem with appearing before the committee to discuss this during the gap, but I cannot agree to a full Committee Stage because we need to get on with the Bill, which has been sitting around for a long time. If that would alleviate the Senator's concerns, I will commit to it.

Senator Grace O'Sullivan: I seek clarification regarding Senator Humphreys's concerns. We were given nearly 20 amendments to this Bill just a day ago. As with the point of planning, we need time to assimilate the information and become confident about signing off on this amendment.

Given his experience, I will ask Senator Humphreys to advise me on-----

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: If amendments are made in this House, they go to the Dáil in committee. That is the process.

Senator Grace O'Sullivan: That is the formal process.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: That is the procedure.

Deputy Damien English: I would commit to having this discussion on Committee Stage if that is what Senator Humphreys wanted.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: It would be a matter for the Dáil to decide.

Senator Grace O'Sullivan: I thank the Leas-Chathaoirleach for the clarification.

Deputy Damien English: Our time would be best spent on getting the actual strategy in place. We must focus our minds on that.

Senator Grace O'Sullivan: Marine spatial planning is a large area and we in the Chamber want to give it that recognition. I want all Senators to give this matter real consideration, as they have done. I take on board the Leas-Chathaoirleach's comments about the process for recommitting on Committee Stage, where Members could have some influence, but I do not want us to sign off on something that was handed to us the day before and into which we have not had ample opportunity to make an input.

Deputy Damien English: By inserting marine spatial planning into this Bill, the House would be giving it importance and allowing us to implement the strategy afterwards. Senators would be saying that marine spatial planning belongs in a planning and development Bill. As Senators will appreciate, there was considerable difficulty in January, February or whenever it was. We were introducing a planning framework, but the legislation had been delayed for months in 2017. The framework caught up with and overtook the legislation. It would be a shame for that to happen again. I would prefer if the legislation was passed and the marine strategy followed. We have started the process, but it is at an early stage. Ideally, we would pass this legislation and use it to guide the process and copper-fasten a role for the Houses that

they would not have if anything happened tomorrow. It is a use of-----

Senator Grace O'Sullivan: Would we not be better off with stand-alone legislation on marine spatial planning?

Deputy Damien English: I do not see how. It would not be necessary. Apart from that, I could not tell the Senator when such a Bill would be before the House. A lot of work has been done on this Bill so far. We felt that the best way to give marine spatial planning the recognition it needed was to include it in this Bill. By doing so, it is placed in parallel with the national planning framework, which is covered by the Bill. They will be aligned in a single Bill and recognised as being equal in terms of being important long-term plans for the country. That is why they are together. I see no great benefit in having a separate Bill. Doing so might give marine spatial planning its own standing, but it would not make much difference.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: In any event, my hands are tied and I must deal with what is in front of me.

Amendment agreed to.

Bill reported with amendment.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Amendments Nos. 2 to 5, inclusive, are related and may be discussed together.

Government amendment No. 2:

In page 13, to delete lines 6 to 9 and substitute the following:

“**31W.** (1) Subject to this section, the Planning Regulator shall be appointed by the Minister and shall hold office upon and subject to such terms and conditions (including terms and conditions relating to remuneration and superannuation) as the Minister may determine with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.”.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Does anyone wish to contribute?

Senator Fintan Warfield: It is too late to speak to amendment No. 1.

Senator Brian Ó Domhnaill: It is a Government amendment.

Deputy Damien English: This grouping proposes minor amendments to sections 31AA and 31AC of the Bill to provide that the staff of the office will be civil servants in the Civil Service of the State. Under section 31AI, the Minister may provide services and resources to the office. It envisages that staff may be seconded on a temporary or permanent basis to the office and that premises, equipment and other services may be made available to it. This will ensure that the office can be established and begin performing its functions as quickly as possible.

Having examined the matter further, savings are likely to be made through the use of shared services in areas such as payroll, human resources and IT, which can be assessed if the staff of the office of the planning regulator are employed as civil servants. Providing that the staff of the office shall be civil servants will also enable their speedier recruitment through the Public Appointments Service, PAS, and access to panels from open competitions as well as ease of staff secondment in the initial phases of the set-up, which will facilitate getting the office up and running in a shorter timeframe. This amendment does not affect the independence of the

regulator, which is already clearly provided for in section 31R.

To clarify the employment basis of the regulator further, a minor technical amendment is proposed to section 31W to include superannuation in subsection (1) as one of the terms and conditions of appointment that will be subject to the Minister's decision and the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

I am also proposing a minor technical amendment to section 31AX(2) to more accurately reflect that the power to bring proceedings for an offence under the section is held by the planning regulator as distinct from the office of the planning regulator.

Amendment agreed to.

Government amendment No. 3:

In page 16, to delete lines 7 to 14.

Amendment agreed to.

Government amendment No. 4:

In page 16, line 38, to delete "under section 31AC or otherwise."

Amendment agreed to.

Government amendment No. 5:

In page 17, to delete lines 6 to 43, and in page 18, to delete lines 1 to 7 and substitute the following:

"Members of staff of Office to be civil servants

31AC. A member of the staff of the Office of the Planning Regulator shall be a civil servant (within the meaning of the Civil Service Regulation Act 1956) in the Civil Service of the State.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Acting Chairman (Senator Victor Boyhan): Amendments Nos. 6 to 16, inclusive, 23 to 25, inclusive, 28, 32 and 34 are related. Amendment No. 10 is consequential on amendment No. 8, amendment No. 11 is consequential on amendment No. 13, and amendment No. 16 is consequential on amendment No. 4. Amendments Nos. 6 to 16, inclusive, 23 to 25, inclusive, 28, 32 and 34 may be discussed together by agreement. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Government amendment No. 6:

In page 22, lines 2 and 3, to delete "provision of statutory observations or submissions" and substitute "provision of observations, submissions or recommendations in accordance with this Act".

Deputy Damien English: These amendments will amend sections 10, 12, 13, 20, 28 and 31 of the principal Act as well as sections 31AL, 31AM, 31AN, 31AP and 31AR of the Bill. The amendments to the above sections of the principal Act, including amendments to the current Planning and Development Bill 2016, as already passed on Committee Stage in the Seanad, are

proposed to strengthen the provisions in the principal Act regarding the adoption and variation of statutory plans, local authority development plans and local area plans, as well as regional, spatial and economic strategies. These amendments are directly related to the proposed establishment of the office of the planning regulator, OPR, pursuant to this Bill and to the powers of the Minister to issue directions based on a failure by a planning authority to implement a recommendation made by the office of the planning regulator or a recommendation made by the Minister prior to the establishment of the OPR. In other words, the effectiveness of the OPR will be much stronger as a result of the amendments.

Under the existing provisions of the planning Act, local authorities when adopting or varying their development plans or local area plans, in addition to setting out objectives for a range of matters including the zoning of land for particular purposes, that is, residential, commercial, industrial or agriculture, the provision of infrastructure to serve the area, namely, transport, water, energy and waste, the protection of the environment and the built heritage, are required to take sufficient account of the proper planning and sustainable development of the area to which the plan relates, the statutory obligation on the local authority and any relevant policies or objectives for the time being of the Government or any Minister.

The existing wording requires the taking of sufficient account of the specified matters which could give rise to certain issues where, for example, elected members in the adoption or variation of development plans do not necessarily implement the spirit of such requirements in the final adopted version of the plan, even though they have been recommended to the planning authority in submissions by the Minister on the draft development plan or local area plan, an advisory function, which is to pass to the OPR on its establishment. An example in that regard would be where the elected members designated only a small area of land in the local authority development plan as suitable for renewable energy purposes, including wind energy, thereby undermining the achievement of national renewable energy objectives in that regard.

In light of the foregoing, the wording of the Act in this regard needs to be further elaborated and strengthened to clarify the need as a step in the adoption of variation processes for development plans and local area plans “to implement” as distinct from “taking sufficient account of” the national and regional development objectives set out in the national planning framework, the relevant regional spatial and economic strategy and the provisions of spatial planning policy requirements incorporated in statutory planning guidelines issued by the Minister pursuant to section 28(1)(c) of the Planning Act, all of which will be the subject of recommendations by the OPR to the planning authority once the OPR is established.

These changes, which will require numerous consequential amendments to the existing provisions of the planning Act, including amendments to ensure compliance with strategic environmental and appropriate assessment requirements, will have the effect of requiring elected members of local authorities and regional assemblies to more fully incorporate and respect national policies and objectives in the final adoption or variation of development plans or local area plans for their respective functional areas, thereby ensuring that such development plans and local area plans are consistent with and aligned to relevant national policies or objectives.

Amendment agreed to.

Government amendment No. 7:

In page 23, to delete line 16 and substitute the following:

“(c) relevant guidelines for planning authorities made under section 28, including the consistency of development plans with any specific planning policy requirements specified in those guidelines;”.

Amendment agreed to.

Government amendment No. 8:

In page 27, line 17, to delete “shall” and substitute “shall, subject to subsection (16)”.

Amendment agreed to.

Government amendment No. 9:

In page 27, to delete lines 23 to 25 and substitute the following:

“(11) From the adoption of a development plan—

(a) such provisions as—

(i) are required to be included in a development plan by virtue of a direction issued by the Minister under section 31, and

(ii) are not so included, shall be deemed to be included in that development plan, and

(b) such provisions of the development plan as do not comply with a direction so issued shall be deemed not to be included in that development plan.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Government amendment No. 10:

In page 27, between lines 38 and 39, to insert the following:

“(16) (a) Where the giving of a direction by the Minister in accordance with subsection (9) would require the making of a material alteration to a development plan, the Minister shall, not later than 3 weeks after the making of the recommendation by the Office under that subsection—

(i) publish a notice of the material alteration that would be so required in at least one newspaper circulating in the administrative area of the local authority that prepared the development plan, and

(ii) send a copy of that notice to the planning authority concerned, the regional assembly concerned, the Office, the Board and the prescribed authorities.

(b) The Minister shall, before giving a direction in accordance with subsection (9), determine—

(i) whether or not a strategic environmental assessment or an appropriate assessment is required to be carried out as respects a material alteration to a development plan that would be required in order to comply with the direction, and

- (ii) where he or she determines that a strategic environmental assessment or an appropriate assessment is so required, the period that it would take to carry out such strategic environmental assessment or appropriate assessment.
- (c) Where the Minister makes a determination under paragraph (b) that a strategic environmental assessment or an appropriate assessment is required to be carried out as respects a material alteration to a development plan that would be required in order to comply with the direction, he or she shall publish a notice of that determination in at least one newspaper circulating in the administrative area of the local authority that prepared the development plan concerned.
- (d) A copy of the determination under paragraph (b) and a copy of the proposed material alteration to the development plan concerned shall, for a period of not less than 4 weeks from the date of the determination, be made available for inspection—
 - (i) by members of the public at such place and at such times as are specified in the notice referred to in paragraph (c), and
 - (ii) on the internet website of the Minister and the internet website of the planning authority concerned.
- (e) A notice to which paragraph (c) applies shall—
 - (i) state that a determination under paragraph (b) has been made for the purposes of giving a direction in accordance with subsection (9),
 - (ii) specify the place at which and times during which copies of the determination under paragraph (b) and the proposed material alteration to the development plan concerned will be made available for inspection by members of the public,
 - (iii) state that such copies will be available for inspection on the internet website of the Minister and the internet website of the planning authority concerned,
 - (iv) invite written submissions or observations with respect to the proposed material alteration or a strategic environmental assessment or appropriate assessment required to be carried out by virtue of the said determination to be made to the Minister before the expiration of such period as specified in the notice, and
 - (v) that any such submissions or observations shall be taken into account by the Minister in giving a direction in accordance with subsection (9).
- (f) The Minister shall carry out a strategic environmental assessment, appropriate assessment, or both, of the proposed material alteration of the development plan within the period determined by the Minister in accordance with paragraph (b).
- (g) The Minister shall, not later than 8 weeks after the publication of a notice under paragraph (c), prepare a report on any submissions or observations received in accordance with that notice.
- (h) A report under paragraph (g) shall—
 - (i) specify the persons who made submissions or observations in accordance with the notice under paragraph (c),

- (ii) provide a summary of those submissions and observations, and
 - (iii) set out the response of the Minister to those submissions and observations.
- (i) The Minister shall, in setting out his or her response to submissions or observations in accordance with the notice under paragraph (c), take account of the following:
- (i) the proper planning and sustainable development of the area to which the proposed development plan is intended to apply,
 - (ii) the duties under statute of the local authority within whose administrative area the proposed development plan is intended to apply,
 - (iii) the necessity of ensuring that the proposed development plan will be consistent with—
 - (I) the national and regional development objectives set out in the National Planning Framework and the regional spatial and economic strategy,
 - (II) specific planning policy requirements specified in guidelines under section 28(1), and
 - (III) policies or objectives for the time being of the Government or of any Minister of the Government.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Government amendment No. 11:

In page 32, line 1, to delete “shall” and substitute “shall, subject to subsection (16)”.

Amendment agreed to.

Government amendment No. 12:

In page 32, to delete lines 7 to 9 and substitute the following:

“(11) From the adoption of a local area plan—

(a) such provisions as—

(i) are required to be included in the local area plan by virtue of a direction issued by the Minister under section 31, and

(ii) are not so included, shall be deemed to be included in that local area plan, and

(b) such provisions of the local area plan as do not comply with a direction so issued shall be deemed not to be included in that local area plan.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Government amendment No. 13:

In page 32, between lines 22 and 23, to insert the following:

“(16) (a) Where the giving of a direction by the Minister in accordance with subsection (9) would require the making of a material alteration to a local area plan, the Minister shall, not later than 3 weeks after the making of the recommendation by the Office under that subsection—

(i) publish a notice of the material alteration that would be so required in at least one newspaper circulating in the administrative area of the local authority that prepared the local area plan, and

(ii) send a copy of that notice to the planning authority concerned, the regional assembly, the Office, the Board and the prescribed authorities.

(b) The Minister shall, before giving a direction in accordance with subsection (9), determine—

(i) whether or not a strategic environmental assessment or an appropriate assessment is required to be carried out as respects a material alteration to a local area plan that would be required in order to comply with the direction, and

(ii) where he or she determines that a strategic environmental assessment or an appropriate assessment is so required, the period that it would take to carry out such strategic environmental assessment or appropriate assessment.

(c) Where the Minister makes a determination under paragraph (b) that a strategic environmental assessment or an appropriate assessment is required to be carried out as respects a material alteration to a local area plan that would be required in order to comply with the direction, he or she shall publish a notice of that determination in at least one newspaper circulating in the administrative area of the local authority that prepared the local area plan concerned.

(d) A copy of the determination under paragraph (b) and a copy of the proposed material alteration to the local area plan concerned shall, for a period of not less than 4 weeks from the date of the determination, be made available for inspection—

(i) by members of the public at such place and at such times as are specified in the notice referred to in paragraph (c), and

(ii) on the internet website of the Minister and the internet website of the planning authority concerned.

(e) A notice to which paragraph (c) applies shall—

(i) state that a determination under paragraph (b) has been made for the purposes of giving a direction in accordance with subsection (9),

(ii) specify the place at which and times during which copies of the determination under paragraph (b) and the proposed material alteration to the local area plan concerned will be made available for inspection by members of the public,

(iii) state that such copies will be available for inspection on the internet website of the Minister and the internet website of the planning authority concerned,

(iv) invite written submissions or observations with respect to the proposed material

alteration or a strategic environmental assessment or appropriate assessment required to be carried out by virtue of the said determination to be made to the Minister before the expiration of such period as specified in the notice, and

(v) that any such submissions or observations shall be taken into account by the Minister in giving a direction in accordance with subsection (9).

(f) The Minister shall carry out a strategic environmental assessment, appropriate assessment, or both, of the proposed material alteration of the local area plan within the period determined by the Minister in accordance with paragraph (b).

(g) The Minister shall, not later than 8 weeks after the publication of a notice under paragraph (c), prepare a report on any submissions or observations received in accordance with that notice.

(h) A report under paragraph (g) shall—

(i) specify the persons who made submissions or observations in accordance with the notice under paragraph (c),

(ii) provide a summary of those submissions and observations, and

(iii) set out the response of the Minister to those submissions and observations.

(i) The Minister shall, in setting out his or her response to submissions or observations in accordance with the notice under paragraph (c), take account of the following:

(i) the proper planning and sustainable development of the area to which the proposed local area plan is intended to apply,

(ii) the duties under statute of the local authority within whose administrative area the proposed local area plan is intended to apply,

(iii) the necessity of ensuring that the proposed local area plan will be consistent with—

(I) the national and regional development objectives set out in the National Planning Framework and the regional spatial and economic strategy,

(II) specific planning policy requirements specified in guidelines under section 28(1), and

(III) policies or objectives for the time being of the Government or of any Minister of the Government.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Government amendment No. 14:

In page 37, line 4, to delete “shall” and substitute “shall, subject to subsection (16)”.

Amendment agreed to.

Government amendment No. 15:

In page 37, to delete lines 10 to 13 and substitute the following:

“(11) From the adoption of a regional spatial and economic strategy—

(a) such provisions as—

(i) are required to be included in the regional spatial and economic strategy by virtue of a direction issued by the Minister under section 31A, and

(ii) are not so included, shall be deemed to be included in that regional spatial and economic strategy, and

(b) such provisions of the regional spatial and economic strategy as do not comply with a direction so issued shall be deemed not to be included in that regional spatial and economic strategy.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Government amendment No. 16:

In page 37, between lines 23 and 24, to insert the following:

“(16) (a) Where the giving of a direction by the Minister in accordance with subsection (9) would require the making of a material alteration to a regional spatial and economic strategy, the Minister shall, not later than 3 weeks after the making of the recommendation by the Office under that subsection—

(i) publish a notice of the material alteration that would be so required in at least one newspaper circulating in the administrative areas of the local authorities to which the regional spatial and economic strategy applies, and

(ii) send a copy of that notice to the planning authorities concerned, the regional assembly concerned, the Office, the Board and the prescribed authorities.

(b) The Minister shall, before giving a direction in accordance with subsection (9), determine—

(i) whether or not a strategic environmental assessment or an appropriate assessment is required to be carried out as respects a material alteration to a regional spatial and economic strategy that would be required in order to comply with the direction, and

(ii) where he or she determines that a strategic environmental assessment or an appropriate assessment is so required, the period that it would take to carry out such strategic environmental assessment or appropriate assessment.

(c) Where the Minister makes a determination under paragraph (b) that a strategic environmental assessment or an appropriate assessment is required to be carried out as respects a material alteration to a regional spatial and economic strategy that would be required in order to comply with the direction, he or she shall publish a notice of that determination in at least one newspaper circulating in the administrative areas of the local authorities to which the proposed regional spatial and economic strategy is intended to apply.

(d) A copy of the determination under paragraph (b) and a copy of the proposed material alteration to the regional spatial and economic strategy concerned shall, for a period of not less than 4 weeks from the date of the determination, be made available for inspection—

(i) by members of the public at such place and at such times as are specified in the notice referred to in paragraph (c), and

(ii) on the internet website of the Minister, the internet website of the regional assembly concerned and the internet websites of the planning authorities to which the proposed regional spatial and economic strategy concerned is intended to apply.

(e) A notice to which paragraph (c) applies shall—

(i) state that a determination under paragraph (b) has been made for the purposes of giving direction in accordance with subsection (9),

(ii) specify the place at which and times during which copies of the determination under paragraph (b) and the proposed material alteration to the regional spatial and economic strategy concerned will be made available for inspection by members of the public,

(iii) state that such copies will be available for inspection on the internet website of the Minister and the internet website of the planning authorities to which the proposed regional spatial and economic strategy concerned is intended to apply,

(iv) invite written submissions or observations with respect to the proposed material alteration or a strategic environmental assessment or appropriate assessment required to be carried out by virtue of the said determination to be made to the Minister before the expiration of such period as specified in the notice, and

(v) that any such submissions or observations shall be taken into account by the Minister in giving a direction in accordance with subsection (9).

(f) The Minister shall carry out a strategic environmental assessment, appropriate assessment, or both, of the proposed material alteration of the regional spatial and economic strategy within the period determined by the Minister in accordance with paragraph (b).

(h) The Minister shall, not later than 8 weeks after the publication of a notice under paragraph (c), prepare a report on any submissions or observations received in accordance with that notice.

(i) A report under paragraph (h) shall—

(i) specify the persons who made submissions or observations in accordance with the notice under paragraph (c),

(ii) provide a summary of those submissions and observations, and

(iii) set out the response of the Minister to those submissions and observations.

(j) The Minister shall, in setting out his or her response to submissions or observa-

tions in accordance with the notice under paragraph (c), take account of the following:

- (i) the proper planning and sustainable development of the administrative areas of the local authorities to which the proposed regional spatial and economic strategy is intended to apply,
- (ii) the duties under statute of the local authorities within whose administrative areas the proposed regional spatial and economic strategy is intended to apply,
- (iii) the necessity of ensuring that the proposed regional spatial and economic strategy will be consistent with—
 - (I) the national and regional development objectives set out in the National Planning Framework,
 - (II) specific planning policy requirements specified in guidelines under section 28(1), and
 - (III) policies or objectives for the time being of the Government or of any Minister of the Government.”.

Amendment agreed to.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Amendments Nos. 17 and 18 are related and may be discussed together by agreement. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Government amendment No. 17:

In page 42, between lines 40 and 41, to insert the following:

“(4) A public body may, for the purposes of a review or examination under section 31AS, 31AT or 31AU, disclose information, records or documents (including personal data within the meaning of Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016¹) in its possession to the Office relating to matters that are the subject of that review or examination.

(5) In this section—‘company’ has the meaning assigned to it by the Companies Act 2014; ‘public body’ means—

- (a) a Department of State,
- (b) the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General,
- (c) the Office of the Ombudsman,
- (d) a local authority (within the meaning of the Local Government Act 1941),
- (e) a body (other than a company) established by or under statute,
- (f) a company established pursuant to a power conferred by or under an enactment, and financed wholly or partly by—
 - (i) moneys provided, or loans made or guaranteed, by a Minister of the Government, or

- (ii) the issue of shares held by or on behalf of a Minister of the Government, or
(g) a company, a majority of the shares in which are held by or on behalf of a Minister of the Government.”.

Amendment agreed to.

Government amendment No. 18:

In page 43, line 33, to delete “by the Office of the Planning Regulator” and substitute “and prosecuted by the Planning Regulator”.

Amendment agreed to.

Government amendment No. 19:

In page 44, between lines 9 and 10, to insert the following:

“Amendment of section 2 of Principal Act 7.

Subsection (1) of section 2 of the Principal Act is amended, in paragraph (b) of the definition of “strategic infrastructure development”, by substituting “subsection (3) or (6) of section 226” for “226(6)”. ”.

Amendment agreed to.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Amendment No. 20 is in the name of Senators Grace O’Sullivan and Black. Amendments Nos. 20 and 36 are related and may be discussed together, by agreement. Is that agreed? Agreed.

I am advised that, unfortunately, Senator Warfield cannot speak to the amendment as one of the proposing Senators must be present in order to move it. The amendment cannot be moved.

Deputy Damien English: On a point of order. Senator Grace O’Sullivan proposed the amendment in good faith. I think she has just gone for a short break. If you want to call a quorum, a Leas-Chathaoirligh, I think she will have time to come back. In fact, here she comes now.

Senator Grace O’Sullivan: I move amendment No. 20:

In page 44, between lines 9 and 10, to insert the following: “Amendment of section 2 of Principal Act

7. Section 2 of the Principal Act is amended in subsection (1) by the insertion of the following:

“ ‘satisfactory completion’ includes compliance of all houses with the Building Regulations.”.”.

Sections 34(4)(f) and (g) of the 2000 Act currently provide that conditions can be imposed requiring satisfactory completion and the giving of security for satisfactory completion. Amendment No. 20 provides that the concept of satisfactory completion includes compliance with existing regulations for houses and apartments.

Amendment No. 36 would require planning authorities to include such conditions when granting permission for developments with more than one dwelling unit. Unfortunately, what often happens to purchasers of houses or apartments which have been built outside the regulations is that they have no comeback to recover the cost of repairing the damage done. Those conditions would help to address the appalling situation faced by owners of houses and apartments which have been badly constructed in multi-unit developments. It requires that the planning permissions for those developments would include security to ensure compliance of the houses or apartments with the building regulations.

Senator Victor Boyhan: I will be brief because we have a lot of work to do in the next few days. On the face of it, the amendment sounds to me like common sense. I would like to hear what the Minister of State has to say but on the basis of what I have heard it makes sense. I will listen to what he has to say before I decide how I will vote.

Senator Kevin Humphreys: I second the amendment. I am sure the Minister of State is aware that the Multi-Unit Developments Act is very much outdated. Right across the country residents of multi-unit developments such as apartment blocks are running into significant problems regarding the repair of what is basically a faulty build in the first instance. Anything that would assist in ensuring compliance in the building of multi-unit developments would be very welcome.

I commend Senator Grace O'Sullivan on introducing the amendment. I would like the Minister of State to examine the situation again given that not a week goes by without me being contacted by people when an apartment development runs into trouble. I welcome the measure if it introduces better security for multi-unit developments but there is a greater job of work to be done outside of this legislation to tackle multi-unit developments, managing agents, management companies and the ongoing insurance problems for apartment blocks around the country.

Deputy Damien English: Amendment No. 20 seeks to define the satisfactory completion of a development and link compliance with the building regulations into the planning system. Amendment No. 36 seeks to make the application of this definition mandatory in all cases of developments of two or more houses.

I do not propose to accept the amendments tabled by Senator Grace O'Sullivan for the following reasons. It is not the function of the planning code to enforce compliance with a separate and distinct regulatory code such as the building regulations. Local authorities are independent in the use of their statutory powers under the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014. The planning system and building control system are two distinct and separate codes. While I understand the objective the Senator is trying to achieve, given that these are two separate codes, the amendment is not the way to achieve that objective.

Under the Building Control Acts 1990 to 2014, the primary responsibility for compliance with the requirements of the building regulations rests with the designers, builders and owners of the buildings with regard to the certification process. Enforcement of the building regulations is a matter for the 31 local building control authorities, which have extensive powers of inspection and enforcement in the event of breaches of the building control regulations. Accordingly, I do not regard it as appropriate that the planning system should be used for ensuring compliance with the building control standards in the manner proposed by Senator Grace O'Sullivan.

I also oppose the amendments because I have no evidence that the existing discretionary arrangements for the attachment of conditions to planning permissions are creating systematic difficulties on the ground. I am particularly concerned that at a time when we are trying to encourage house building across the State, the proposal in the amendments would impose additional mandatory planning conditions, including financial requirements, on smaller house builders operating on tight margins. Currently, it is a discretionary matter for each planning authority to decide whether to attach specific types of additions to planning permissions in individual cases, including conditions relating to the satisfactory completion of a development of two houses or more and conditions requiring the provision of adequate security for the satisfactory completion of a proposed development. This is infinitely preferable to imposing blanket requirements to attach conditions relating to the satisfactory completion of development in all cases.

The regulatory systems relating to planning, fire safety, accessibility, building control and conservation are perceived as creating competing agendas and therefore need to be separately addressed in accordance with their respective legislative requirements. Accordingly, I must oppose the amendments.

I understand what the Senator seeks to achieve with regard to unsatisfactory buildings that have been built in the past. We have addressed this issue through changes made to the building control regulations since 2014. The certification process in place is probably second to none in Europe and is very much enforced. Many of the concerns people have relate to buildings completed prior to 2014. This Government and the previous Fine Gael-Labour Party Government have made changes to strengthen the regulatory and building control processes. It is not necessary to align these processes with the planning process. I will not support the amendments.

Acting Chairman (Senator Kieran O'Donnell): Does Senator Grace O'Sullivan wish to make a further comment?

Senator Grace O'Sullivan: I will press the amendment.

Amendment put:

The Seanad divided: Tá, 13; Níl, 15.	
Tá	Níl
Bacik, Ivana.	Burke, Colm.
Black, Frances.	Burke, Paddy.
Boohan, Victor.	Buttimer, Jerry.
Conway-Walsh, Rose.	Byrne, Maria.
Higgins, Alice-Mary.	Coffey, Paudie.
Humphreys, Kevin.	Hopkins, Maura.
Kelleher, Colette.	Lawlor, Anthony.
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	McFadden, Gabrielle.
Nash, Gerald.	Noone, Catherine.
O'Sullivan, Grace.	O'Donnell, Kieran.
Ó Domhnaill, Brian.	O'Mahony, John.
Ó Donnghaile, Niall.	O'Reilly, Joe.
Warfield, Fintan.	Ó Céidigh, Pádraig.

	Reilly, James.
	Richmond, Neale.

Tellers: Tá, Senators Grace O’Sullivan and Fintan Warfield; Níl, Senators Gabrielle McFadden and John O’Mahony.

Amendment declared lost.

Debate adjourned.

Message from Dáil

Acting Chairman (Senator Kieran O’Donnell): On 30 May 2018 Dáil Éireann passed the Education (Admissions to Schools) Bill 2016, to which the agreement of Seanad Éireann is desired. On 31 May 2018 Dáil Éireann has passed the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill 2017, to which the agreement of Seanad Éireann is desired. On 31 May 2018 Dáil Éireann agreed to amendments Nos. 1 to 3, inclusive, and 5 to 8, inclusive, made by Seanad Éireann to the Mental Health (Amendment) Bill 2017. Dáil Éireann has not agreed to amendment No. 4 and desires Seanad Éireann not to insist thereon.

Marine Spatial Planning: Statements

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): On behalf of the Government and my Department I am pleased to provide an update on marine spatial planning, following on from Senator Grace O’Sullivan’s motion last month on marine environment matters. The Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, and I are delighted to have the chance to have this discussion on what is an important area. We had a discussion on the planning Bill earlier and I think it is important that we recognise how important it is that we have this strategy, that we devise it and get everybody involved as much as we can. The Minister, the Department and I are clear on this and would like to engage both Houses of the Oireachtas, with the committee process, in the next year and a half to two years, as we develop the plan which is important for the country and will mirror the concept followed with the national planning framework.

In May we had a debate on Senator Grace O’Sullivan’s motion on the marine and marine environment matters, in which everyone took a great interest. All of the contributors to the debate appeared to agree that, as an island nation, the marine environment was a national asset that gave us many commercial and non-commercial benefits, for example, in the areas of biodiversity, seafood, tourism, recreation, renewable energy, cultural heritage and shipping. People are passionate about our seas. The future sustainable use, enjoyment and development of the marine area will affect many. Managing our ocean wealth requires an overarching national marine spatial plan for a structure to help to realise the full benefits of our ocean wealth and assist in managing our resources effectively and sustainably.

Acting Chairman (Senator Kieran O’Donnell): Is a copy of the Minister of State’s script available for Members?

Deputy Damien English: We will arrange for copies to be made available, if we can.

The development of an overarching national marine spatial plan was identified as a Government policy objective in Ireland's integrated marine plan, Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth. We identified that the organisation, regulation and protection of marine-based activity in Irish waters were being carried out on a sectoral and demand-driven basis, without a strategic framework in which sectoral policy objectives could be envisioned, planned for and delivered in the long term.

Marine spatial planning is also underpinned by EU legislation. The 2014 marine spatial planning directive established an EU-wide framework which defined marine spatial planning as a process by which the relevant member states authorised, analysed and organised human activities in marine areas to achieve ecological, economic and social objectives. It is important that the words "social objectives" are included because during the last debate it was felt we were not prioritising them. Clearly, they are included at a European and national level. That is what this is about; it is not just about the economy. It includes ecological, social and economic objectives.

The directive details the main goals and minimum requirements for member states as balanced and sustainable territorial development of marine waters and coastal zones; optimised development of maritime activities and business climate; better adaptation to risks; resource-efficient and integrated coastal and maritime development; lower transaction costs for maritime businesses and improved national competitiveness; improved certainty and predictability for private investments; improved certainty in obtaining financing for investments in the maritime area; improved use of sea space and the best possible coexistence of uses in coastal zones and marine waters; improved attractiveness of coastal regions as places in which to live and invest; reduced co-ordination costs for public authorities; greater development of innovation and research; and enhanced and integrated data and information. From a previous role as Minister of State with responsibility for skills, research and innovation, I know that there is an opportunity. We invest a lot of taxpayers' money in the research and development agenda. We have Innovation 2020, a plan into which we all buy, which brings Departments together and involves the use of taxpayers' money and private sector investment. There is an opportunity at European level for Ireland to lead the way in research and innovation in this area, certainly in the marine sector. We should be proud of this and take the opportunity to do so. There is a lot of marine space under our watch and we should avail of the opportunities presented much more. I hope we will be able to focus on it more clearly.

We transposed the directive through the European Union (Framework for Maritime Spatial Planning) Regulations 2016 which were signed into law on 29 June 2016. The regulations identify the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government as the competent authority for marine spatial planning, reflecting my Department's track record and expertise in forward planning generally. Senators will be aware from our earlier discussion that I am proposing amendments to the Planning and Development Bill 2016 to replace the existing regulations with a new primary legislative basis for marine spatial planning. I understand people accepted this in the end and agreed that, even though the process is a bit short, on the importance of doing so. Hopefully we will all benefit from that as we move on to develop our strategy. I want to give MSP greater prominence and introduce new arrangements for the plan-making process including governance, public participation, review and Oireachtas involvement, to ensure that the processes for making Ireland's two long-term forward spatial plans, one marine and the other terrestrial, are consistent and fully aligned, with equal importance.

Working within the existing framework, the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, and I launched Towards a Marine Spatial Plan for Ireland, a roadmap for the development of Ireland's first marine spatial plan, in December 2017. In the roadmap document, we have clearly set out the principles of engagement for this process. We believe that marine spatial plans should be strategic, concise and informed by effective public and stakeholder participation to ensure buy-in with regard to implementation. We genuinely want that stakeholder participation and public involvement. We will have to go to great lengths to get that public interest and involvement. We attend many school events relating to this space and there is a lot of interest from young people. We have to get the same interest from different generations and all their families, to really get involved in this process, to get behind it and to think about what the plans are for our marine strategy for the next 15, 20 or 25 years. Hopefully we will be able to achieve that through different mechanisms. It is important that we have these debates in this House to highlight the issue and get the discussion going. Even online polls get people interested in this and it is important that we have that, to have people speak up about this space. We will go to great lengths to encourage people to contribute to that.

The importance of involving all stakeholders in the marine planning and marine sectoral issues was raised repeatedly during our discussion last month on Senator Grace O'Sullivan's motions and I am deeply committed to that, as is the Minister, Deputy Eoghan Murphy, and our Department. The participation processes for MSP are being designed, tailored and structured to ensure meaningful, informed and timely engagement with the plan-making process. We are committed to involving people early on in the decision-making process and in developing specific policy within the framework provided by Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth, HOOW; engaging with interested people and organisations at the appropriate time using tailored and effective engagement methods, allowing sufficient time for meaningful consultation; and being adaptable, recognising that some consultation methods work better for some people and some issues and that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work.

I have met many of the groups involved. I am conscious that different forms of consultation will be needed and people will require different ways to get their thoughts together. It will not always be possible to have people together in one room, but we will go to great lengths to make sure that we get everyone's thoughts and initial concerns and deal with them as we go through the process to make sure we get the balance right as we develop this plan.

The process will also involve respecting the diversity of people and their lifestyles and giving people a fair chance to have their voices heard regardless of gender, age, race, abilities, sexual orientation, circumstances or wherever they live. It will involve being clear in the purpose of any engagement and how the public may contribute, letting people know how their views have been taken into account within agreed timescales, and making documents publicly available on the Department's website.

Senator Ó Domhnaill said that the feedback was not great. If people make a submission and if time allows, we could come back with feedback to explain why we did or did not take on board their thoughts. That would probably help further consultation. Although we want a national consultation, there may have been fewer submissions under the previous planning framework. We may have an opportunity to address that as best as we possibly can. When people get feedback it encourages more involvement. Another element is communicating clearly with people, using plain English and avoiding jargon as much as we possibly can, given that it is a jargon-filled area.

In line with these objectives, a three-pronged engagement strategy is now underway and I want to spend some time outlining how this will happen. First, we have established an interdepartmental group to lead and oversee the development of the MSP. The group is chaired by my Department and is made up of senior representatives from the Marine Institute, local government and Departments whose policies and functions are relevant to the plan.

Second, I have been tasked with chairing an advisory group to facilitate participation in the MSP process by all relevant stakeholders from the economic, environmental and social pillars. The purpose of the advisory group is to harness the potential and capacity of a broad range of sectors, including representation from the public, business, environmental, social and knowledge-based sectors, to guide strategic thinking and decision-making in the preparation of marine spatial plans. We met for the first time in early March and tomorrow we will meet for the second time. The outputs of the group will also inform the work of the interdepartmental MSP group and provide updates, reports or recommendations as required.

The third strand is stakeholder engagement. This is a parallel process with a strong focus on awareness raising among coastal communities, smaller unaligned stakeholders and individual members of larger representative bodies. This strand is critically important and I hope we can get more people involved in the process. I thank the many Senators who have engaged in that process, including Senator Grace O'Sullivan, and I encourage others to do the same when they have the opportunity to do so.

Staff from the MSP team in my Department have been engaged in a series of public engagements throughout the country over recent months and this will continue. These have ranged from conference presentations and meetings with sectoral groups such as the regional inshore fisheries forums, whose members are representative of the inshore sector, and fishermen using boats of less than 12 m in overall length, to smaller public meetings in coastal communities to help the public understand how they can feed into the plan by getting involved in the consultation processes. The latter have been advertised via local and regional groups, local newspapers, direct contact with stakeholder groups and using social media, in particular Twitter.

I ask Senators who are in daily contact with councillors and are working with others to encourage participation and ask colleagues at different levels of politics to spread the word. The local meetings are, by design, informal and low key and are taking place at the earliest possible stage before any ink has been committed to paper in a draft plan. They are intended purely to help explain the concept and processes around MSP and to give people time and space to think about how they want to shape the plan during the formal consultation and participation phases. Larger, more regionally focused events will take place in the autumn of this year and into early 2019.

I want to be very clear. We are an open book on this. There is no agenda and we do not have a plan in place. We genuinely want to hear everyone's views and thoughts. We are working with colleagues from other countries who have brought forward their own marine strategies and plans and are engaging with them on how the process worked for them, how they got people involved, and how they made their final decisions. There is a meeting this week with stakeholders from other countries who have been through this process. It is important that we recognise the work which is being carried out by staff in my Department and other Departments who have an interest in this area and are putting extra efforts into making sure we get this right. It is important that we do that.

The first opportunity for formal input will arise in the autumn following the publication of our baseline report. This document will outline the current situation in our seas, that is, the situation in terms of capturing the nature and locations of existing activities, developments and marine uses. The baseline report will also pose a series of questions to stakeholders to help frame their submissions. It will be published in September 2018 and will kick-start a two-month consultation period.

Following this, the draft MSP, including environmental assessments, is intended to be completed by quarter 2 of 2019 and will be followed by a three-month public consultation. Senators can see all the different elements of public consultation. It is a pity that Senator Ó Domhnaill has missed my contribution. Maybe people could inform him that we are going out of our way to make sure that there is consultation for everybody right throughout the process. We are very happy to come in here for a debate on this at any stage or to have a conversation in committee or in the Dáil because we want to have that conversation and involve all Members as much as possible.

In terms of the formal consultation on the draft marine plan, once the consultation period has closed, the responses will be analysed and a summary report, detailing any comments made, will be produced and published on our website. We will try to address at a detailed enough level, if possible, the issues people have raised so that they will understand that their submissions were read and taken on board, even though we might not be able to include everyone's idea.

This report will also set out any changes made to the plans as well as any changes that were not made and the reasons for that. Everyone who submitted a response will be notified when it is published. The final plan will be in place by mid-2020, just 30 months on from the launch of our roadmap document in December 2017. Once the plan is in place, it will be a key strategic spatial framework encompassing all plans and sectoral policies for the marine area. It will provide a coherent framework in which those sectoral policies and objectives can be realised. It will be the key decision-making tool for regulatory authorities and policymakers into the future in a number of ways, including decisions on individual consent applications which will have to be in line with the provisions of the plan in the same way that terrestrial plans form part of the decision-making toolkit in the on-land planning process. We will try to engage more online as we go through the planning and development Bill.

Ireland's national marine planning framework will close the loop, just as the national planning framework does for land-based sectors, by providing a key input to the development of future sectoral marine policies. It is about taking a long-term vision to areas that affect this country and looking ahead for next 20 to 25 years. I look forward to working with colleagues from all parties over the next two years of this process and it is to be hoped we can complete our work by the deadline.

Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I thank the Minister of State. He spoke about public consultation, which is important. Recently, Seal Rescue Ireland, which receives no State funding for its important work, released back into the wild seals who had been badly hurt in the ocean. During the release it spoke to schoolchildren about the importance of our oceans and marine life. That is an avenue the Minister of State needs to look at. He needs to talk to schools and children because they are part of our life.

There were in excess of 1,000 submissions to the national planning framework and the date was extended. We need to make sure that awareness is part of this process. I welcome that the

Minister of State is looking for that because consultation will have a significant impact on this process.

It struck me that for an island nation we do not prioritise our ocean, beaches and marine life. We need to start immediately. The marine sector is a vital part of Ireland's economy. It provides key parts of our tourism and film industries, creates and sustains jobs, boosts small local economies and enriches our landscape. Protecting and maintaining the quality of our oceans is a pressing concern for the long-term health of our State and future generations. If the Minister of State will excuse the pun, we need to take our heads out of the sand on this.

Ireland has specific legally binding EU obligations in regard to achieving good environmental standards in our seas. The Government, however, has failed to implement the required steps effectively. Linked to this is the failure of a number of our beaches to pass Environmental Protection Agency, EPA, standards. Our tourism sector draws heavily from clean oceans that sustain our nation. Our marine life depends on our clean oceans.

The roll-out of marine protected areas as part of a broader oceans Act must be an integral part of the process of meeting those obligations. A well-resourced and single Department-led response is critical to the success of any strategy to tackle the serious challenges our oceans face. Ireland has failed in its European and international obligations to protect 10% of its marine waters under Article 13 of the MSFD, the Aichi biodiversity targets, the UN sustainable development goals and the OSPAR Convention. Ireland was declared a whale and dolphin sanctuary in 1991, yet the incidence of whales and dolphins becoming beached has increased by 350% over the past ten years. A report by the Irish Wildlife Trust published this year shows that 48 indigenous species face extinction. Fossil fuel exploration using seismic testing has regularly occurred in Irish waters since 2013 and severely impacts on all marine life in the areas in which it is conducted. The Government should adopt measures to tackle our unsustainable production of plastic waste and microbeads, an issue addressed in previous Private Members' legislation. Micro-plastics cause entirely unnecessary pollution and have a negative environmental impact. Studies have shown that they can be ingested by marine animals causing physical and reproductive harm and toxic effects. There is evidence to suggest that micro-plastics have entered the human food chain but, thankfully, not yet in sufficient quantities to pose a risk to human health. These are all areas the Minister must address.

We, in Fianna Fáil, support the actions proposed in the motion debated in the Seanad in May to strengthen Ireland's role in protecting our natural ocean resources for future generations. An oceans Act must be introduced providing for the protection of 50% of Ireland's seas and ocean through an ecologically coherent network of diverse and significant marine protected areas, MPAs. Such legislation should contain mechanisms to identify designated high-quality MPAs and ensure they are managed with respect for sustainable livelihoods and their ecologically coherence, as part of a European network. The legislation should establish a consultation process that involves all key stakeholders from the areas of fisheries, recreational fisheries, tourism, energy, conservation and other relevant sectors. We need to ensure that every one of these sectors plays its part in protecting our seas and oceans.

A major public awareness campaign is also needed. As I have stated previously, awareness is one of the issues we need to address. In 2018, it is unacceptable that we must call on the Department to raise awareness, whether through educational channels or a body established by the Minister for this purpose. We need to ensure that schools and all other relevant bodies are aware of what is happening because this issue concerns our future. We all live on this earth to-

gether and we must, therefore, help future generations by ensuring we pass on a healthy planet to them because they will inherit the consequences of whatever decisions we make today. This is a long-term issue that will have a major impact on our health and the way we live our lives. We must ensure that legislation and planning in this area are appropriate. I know that the Minister of State will work to achieve this and that it will be a long process. I urge him to make sure the relevant bodies are properly consulted and all of them have their say.

Senator Victor Boyhan: I thank the Minister of State for his attendance. It is ironic that we are debating a marine spatial plan immediately after debating planning legislation. Perhaps if we had taken these statements first, we would not have spent so much time debating the planning Bill. I welcome the decision to produce a national marine plan as such a plan will be important.

I am a member of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, which met for three days in the past week. Yesterday, we had a meaningful debate on spatial planning. I raised with my counterparts from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales the importance of having a marine spatial plan. Many assembly members referred to collaboration between the Northern Ireland authorities and the authorities here. Collaboration is particularly important when one lives on an island. I am aware of the complexities of Northern Ireland politics and I know the Northern Ireland Assembly is not up and running. We must be mindful that we live on an island and that decisions affect the entire island, particularly the fishing community in the northern half of the country extending right up into Donegal. Discussions are needed on these issues. One of the features of the national planning framework is that it embraces the island of Ireland. Greater co-operation between the authorities in the North and South will be necessary. This does not need to be complex; just an understanding of what we are about and what we are trying to do.

I welcome the proposed introduction of a marine spatial plan for Ireland, which will act as a roadmap for future development. It will be the first time the country has had a marine spatial plan. It is important the plan is balanced and takes into account various views, specifically those of the people who work in the industry, including fisheries, tourism, transport, offshore renewable energy generation and oil and gas exploration. I live in the coastal town of Dún Laoghaire. Offshore exploration for gas conducted in the area beyond Dalkey Island was controversial and resulted in thousands of people attending public meetings. Offshore exploration is a sensitive matter, which is understandable. The public consultation highlighted the absence of a marine spatial plan.

The proposed marine spatial plan will be comprehensive and will refer to aquaculture, climate change, communities, health, culture, heritage, marine environment, biodiversity, trans-boundary issues and interactions with other jurisdictions. It will take a long time to address all these issues. We need to be mindful of seafood production, aquaculture, maritime transport and renewable energy. The marine area is highly diverse and I do not know how the Minister of State will deal with everything.

The Minister of State referred to Project Ireland 2040, the national planning framework. Now that we have a national spatial plan for land-based planning, a marine spatial plan will be very important. The process of drawing up a marine spatial plan requires engagement and consultation with local communities and residents, public representative, regional authorities and executives. Their views must be taken into account.

I suggest that the Minister of State gives greater priority to the marine spatial plan on his

Department's website. While some very good information is available on the website, it is hard to find. I suggest that he ask his officials to publish a piece about the plan on the website. I have read the information available on the website and I was very impressed with it. This information should be made more visible.

I ask the Minister of State to consider engaging with city and county councillors in the form of workshops. I often hear about the strategic planning committees, SPCs, in local authorities. I suggest the Minister of State write to the chairs of the planning SPCs in the 31 local authorities requesting that they make marine spatial planning a lead item on their agendas in due course in order that meaningful discussions take place on the issue. We have heard so much about local governance and devolving powers to local government. We now have an ideal opportunity to ask local authorities to facilitate in their county halls, which are public buildings that we own, meetings with officials and experts in the field. I would like to see more town hall meetings about issues. This issue is a good example of an area on which officials can engage in discussions with members of the public.

The fishing industry is concentrated in Donegal, the west and south. A large number of people are exercised about maritime activities, including marine leisure activities.

We need to discuss the policy on ports and the transfer of functions from port companies to local authorities, many of which are in a position to assume such responsibility. While they may be willing to do this work, they do not have adequate resources, funding or expertise to do so. In that regard, Dún Laoghaire Harbour, one of the best ports in Europe, springs to mind. Unfortunately, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, under port policy, assigned responsibility for the harbour to the local authority, which does not have the money or expertise to sustain or operate the port company.

I call for greater engagement on the plan. It is important that it is given a higher profile on the Department's website. I urge the Minister of State to start this process by arranging meetings and discussions. I do not doubt his commitment to this matter. It is important that we have a marine spatial plan. The key to success will be to have early engagement and consultation with all relevant sectors, from the fishing and aquaculture sector to leisure and sports interests. I wish the Minister of State the best of luck with the plan.

Senator Paudie Coffey: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this critical debate, which follows on from our earlier discussion on the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016. As an island nation, it is important that we place a great deal of significance on our plans to sustain the resources of our surrounding marine environment. As the Minister of State has acknowledged, much of the groundwork in this regard was done in 2012, when the Government of the day clearly stated its policy objectives in the Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth plan, which outlined the need to develop a national marine spatial plan. Six years have passed since then, however, and the 2014 EU spatial planning directive now obliges Ireland to develop its own spatial plan. That is why earlier this evening, I welcomed the amendments to the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016 that set out clearly the legislative framework for a new marine spatial plan for this country. The Seanad will have a further opportunity tomorrow to engage with and debate the benefits of that framework.

I have to say we have not stood idly by. I note the presence in the Chamber of my colleague from County Waterford, Senator Grace O'Sullivan, who has a track record as an activist in the marine environment. I sincerely acknowledge that she brings great experience to the House by

virtue of her efforts and activism over many years in identifying the threats to our marine environment. It behoves us as a country to put in place protections in areas like micro-plastics, the sustainability of the ecosystem and the various species that exist in the marine area surrounding Ireland.

We need to acknowledge the work that has been done by the Government. Many parties in this House opposed the establishment of Irish Water, which has made great progress by installing sustainable wastewater treatment systems around the country. My own county of Waterford now has four blue flag beaches - two in Dunmore East, one in Tramore and one in Ardmore. We did not have them before now because Irish Water was not in place. Since its establishment, Irish Water has invested in modern wastewater treatment systems. We are no longer pumping raw sewage into our beaches and harbours. We are now pumping out water that has been treated in wastewater systems. There needs to be greater recognition of such advancements. It is often not popular to mention Irish Water, but I think we should talk on the public record about the great work it is doing around the country. I acknowledge the progress it is making in improving the water quality in tributaries, waterways and streams. It is important to mention that treated water is being pumped out into the marine environment that we want to protect.

When we discussed the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016 earlier, the Minister of State mentioned that he was taking the first legislative steps towards a new marine spatial strategy for this country. Various Senators have spoken about the importance of engagement and consultation. I remind the Minister of State that the fisheries local action groups, or FLAGs, comprise an excellent development network right around the coastal communities of Ireland. Local community volunteers are running these FLAGs which receive grant assistance from the Government as local initiatives. I think this network would be a great starting point for engagement with coastal communities. Many of those involved in the FLAGs are fishermen or have made their livelihoods from the marine environment. They have learned a lot from the past.

When we are speaking about the marine environment, we need to acknowledge that some of the practices of the past are no longer sustainable. I watched a very interesting Irish documentary on the various species that exist in the Atlantic Ocean. The increased awareness that results from such programmes being watched in living rooms around the country is of assistance as we seek to engage with communities and citizens on the marine spatial strategy. Another documentary I watched showed how former whaling factories in Australia, which were previously used for activities that threatened the future of whales as a species, are now used as conservation centres where stories are told to educate communities and families about how whales can be sustained. I think the populations are building again.

It is important to put policy, legislation and regulations in place to protect the ecosystems in our marine environment. The wealth of resources in that environment is also important. There are species that can be fished in a sustainable way to meet people's eating needs. The energy potential of our marine environment is also relevant in this context. We know about the wave and tidal energy projects that have been piloted. I would love to see many of them being advanced as more commercial energy generation initiatives. There have been many objections to wind farms in local communities. I believe there is great potential for offshore wind farms that can be built in a sustainable way to harness wind energy and transport it back onto the grid system in our country. The marine spatial plan will allow for coherent and sustainable planning in a vast area. I think Ireland has the second largest marine spatial planning area in the EU. Portugal has the largest such area. We have almost 500,000 sq. km. of marine space around our

island. It is right for us to plan for that space in a sustainable way.

I have spoken about engagement and consultation. I have mentioned the network of FLAGs. Our schools and educational institutes are a rich resource for engaging with communities. I believe various Departments have a responsibility in this regard. As I have said, we are all responsible for the ecosystems in the oceans and seas around us. I understand that the in-depth knowledge which is required for marine planning is probably new to many people. I presume people with expertise in the Marine Institute and other bodies will be involved in this process. When local authorities and regional assemblies engage in terrestrial planning or land planning, they can call on the vast wealth of experience that has been built up by planners. I understand there are experts on this relatively new area in the Marine Institute. The Minister of State might tell the House whether he plans to bring in experts to help us to plan for our marine environment in a sustainable way.

I would like to make a suggestion that does not relate directly to the marine spatial plan but relates to the protection of the environment. There are initiatives for collecting farm plastics in this country. People are incentivised to collect farm plastics so they can be disposed of in a responsible way. I believe there is room for another initiative, perhaps led by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, that would involve the collection of plastics from our harbours, rivers and ports. The Government should consider the introduction of a type of grant scheme or initiative to incentivise people to collect plastics from bodies of water and thereby improve the environment in such areas. Of course we need to come up with other policies to lessen the impact of plastics. Senator Grace O'Sullivan proposed the Micro-plastic and Micro-bead Pollution Prevention Bill 2016 to deal with types of plastic found in products used for washing. I agree that we need to ban such products.

There is so much we can do. It is an exciting time for Ireland because we are leading the way in the area of marine spatial planning. We have an abundance of species and natural resources around our island. We need to adapt to the opportunities that are presenting themselves in a sustainable manner that is in the longer-term interests of the species we have mentioned and the citizens of Ireland as well.

Acting Chairman (Senator Gerry Horkan): I remind Senators that this debate will adjourn at 7 p.m. if it has not concluded by then. Depending on how long the remaining speakers take, we will have to adjourn today and the Minister of State will have to come back on another day to give his response.

Senator Grace O'Sullivan: I am delighted we are here to talk about the marine spatial strategy, which is one of my favourite subjects. I thank Senator Coffey for his remarks about my work with various environmental non-governmental organisations over the years and his recognition of the importance of marine spatial planning. When he mentioned that whales are migratory species, I was reminded that our duty of care and responsibility is not confined to our own nation of Ireland but extends internationally in line with our status as a member state of the EU and a member of the global community. One can see whales and the other species we have been discussing in Antarctica, if one has the pleasure of going there.

Senator Paudie Coffey: They do not recognise boundaries.

Senator Grace O'Sullivan: Equally, they can be seen off the Irish coast. We are talking here about the great marine space. I agree wholeheartedly with Senator Coffey that this is a tre-

mendously exciting time for Ireland. We have a significant opportunity to recognise the value of the biodiversity around our coast in terms of climate change. Seaweed is a sequester of carbon. I do not like the word “harness” but how will we look at it? How will we mind our natural marine resources for the State and for the people? I refer to the recent issue of Bantry Bay and the mechanical harvesting of seaweed. I am not opposed to the development of technology and mechanics, but I am opposed to systems that lead to the unsustainability of our natural environment. The people of Bantry have put up a fight against it and the matter has gone to the courts. I know the Minister has been very involved. We may take action and recognise along the way that we are on the wrong path and we need to reflect, review and reassess and, therefore, change course. That happens. It is a strong Government or person who can do that.

I had the pleasure of being on Lough Melvin in County Leitrim this weekend. I surfed on Rossnowlagh beach, where I had surfed back in the 1980s. I had the pleasure of standing under a waterfall with a group of women who are involved in ocean development, Dr. Easkey Britton and Dr. Ruth Brennan, Irish people who have so much to contribute to this debate. I will be bringing them to the Minister’s attention to ensure that we have the best of expertise. Senator Coffey is right, when one is dealing with terrestrial planning, one looks to the local authorities, however, with marine planning, to whom do we look? I would like to hear the Minister’s comments on the Marine Institute and the different agencies around the coast, particularly the community fisheries. There is a necessity to have stakeholder involvement. We need the creativity of fishermen and small farmers.

On the issue of plastic in our oceans, I had a conversation recently with a heritage fisherman in Cheekpoint, County Waterford. Mr. Sean Doherty had the idea that if we put nets on the weirs, which are 500 years old, they would catch plastic. One can use the weirs, an old system that has a heritage value which needs to be maintained not only for natural resources of catching fish but also for other purposes. That is what I want to see for the marine environment in Ireland. I want to see significant innovation and a stop to practices that are causing a bad effect on climate change. I will nail it. It is fossil fuels exploration and exploitation, which is leading us on the road to nowhere. As Senator Coffey stated, we have every opportunity with renewables. The offshore wind turbines act as marine protected areas because the base of the structure attracts a wildlife habitat. If there is a no-go zone around them, there is a real benefit in terms of fish nurseries and fish stocks. The species will leave the area and the fishermen can really profit from the spillover of the marine life.

It is an exciting time. It is exciting for health, wellness, tourism, biodiversity and climate change. I embrace the process, albeit a little bit late in the day in respect of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive 2008. We need to get on with it, but let us try to get it right. We are an island nation. We are strategically important in European terms because of our marine environment. We need to work the system in the European Union to give us the recognition of an island nation. Let us embrace our marine spatial environment and plan its future well for all the people of the island.

Acting Chairman (Senator Gerry Horkan): I thank Senator O’Sullivan. Our final speaker before the Minister is Senator Ó Donnghaile, who has eight minutes

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: Beidh mé gasta. Cuirim failte roimh an Aire Stáit agus gabhaim buíochas leis.

Our offshore environment is an immense resource. We have one of the largest coastlines

in the European Union, as Senator Coffey mentioned. At present this resource is completely under utilised in terms of what it could fulfil. Other states with much less sea area are miles ahead of us.

Taking in the exclusive economic zone which the State is entitled to develop, the territory available extends 200 miles out to sea. In terms of renewable energy, the potential alone of offshore development presents immense opportunity, but it is virtually non-existent at present. We have one offshore wind farm. We have a very convoluted planning regime for offshore projects, which must go through multiple consent bodies and we have little drive to change this. The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment produced a document back in 2014, the Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan, which outlines some of the potential in this State in terms of offshore wind, tidal and wave energy that could be supplying the State with clean renewable energy and increasing our security of supply. In particular, there are much more possibilities in offshore wind than onshore wind. With onshore wind, we do not have communities onboard to develop it. Other states have large community involvement. I acknowledge that the Minister referenced this in his contribution and is seeking to go some way to address it. There has been no movement on the document overall since 2014.

Our renewable energy outlook has been one dimensional and short-sighted. Planned reform for offshore projects has been promised but not delivered. We only have the heads of the maritime area and foreshore (amendment) Bill. The heads have been approved since 2015, but we are simply not taking the area seriously. We see a piecemeal approach, with an insertion into the planning and development Bill, which does these very complex processes no justice at all.

Scotland, with a similar population to this State has extensively developed its offshore resources. It has many offshore wind projects, including the world's first floating offshore wind farm. It has also streamlined its offshore consent process through the body, Marine Scotland. There are other examples in Denmark and Germany, which have much less coastline and from which we could learn. We should be streets ahead of where we are.

We have not developed the offshore resources. It beggars belief that there is still no movement on this issue. All developments must be balanced against the highest environmental protection measures being put in place. What offshore development has been conducted has been in fossil fuel extraction and we are all aware of the poor deal this State has got from it - one of the worst deals in the world.

I am conscious of the time and I wish to give the Minister the opportunity to respond to my colleagues and me.

Acting Chairman (Senator Gerry Horkan): I thank Senator Ó Donnghaile. The Leader has indicated he wishes to speak.

Business of Seanad

Senator Jerry Buttiner: Notwithstanding what was agreed on the Order of Business today, it is proposed that we continue this debate until 7.15 p.m., which will give the Minister five minutes to reply at the end.

Acting Chairman (Senator Gerry Horkan): The Minister can reply now.

Senator Jerry Buttiner: I wish to make a contribution.

Acting Chairman (Senator Gerry Horkan): So the Leader is extending the time for himself as much as the Minister.

Senator Jerry Buttiner: I feel guilty, given that Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile was ag caint.

Acting Chairman (Senator Gerry Horkan): Is that agreed? Agreed.

Marine Spatial Planning: Statements (Resumed)

Senator Jerry Buttiner: The contributions of Senators, in particular Senator Coffey, on this issue are important. Last night Mr. Derek Mooney hosted an ongoing debate on the importance of our maritime environment during his radio programme. In the context of spatial planning, I refer to the decision of An Bord Pleanála to grant a licence to Indaver for an incinerator in the heart of Cork Harbour in Ringaskiddy.

That flies in the face of the Government's and the Tánaiste's plan for Cork Harbour in tandem with what the Minister of State has outlined. It is about identifying the importance of the harbour as an asset to Cork from a recreational, leisure and commercial point of view.

7 o'clock We are facilitating the movement of the Port of Cork downstream to Ringaskiddy. Residents in Ringaskiddy at the mouth of Cork Harbour have chemical and pharmaceutical industries and have worked with a lot of different organisations to ensure we have seen a gain in that area. I am baffled. EU legislation on marine spatial planning and the strategy around it and the different framework directives that have been given indicate that the development of an incinerator in Cork Harbour is a wrong decision. Given what the inspector and the board have said in terms of their contributions, it certainly does not add up.

I am digressing a little from the statements on the marine spatial strategy. I commend the Minister of State for his work. Cork Harbour and Monkstown are enticing people to come into Cork, be it on pleasure boats, ocean liners or cruise ships. In the context of the Port of Cork relocating and its great importance to Cork, I am really disappointed by the decision of An Bord Pleanála. I commend the people of CHASE, the local residents' associations in Ringaskiddy and Cobh and the residents of Monkstown for their work and endurance.

The Minister of State spoke about public participation, review and Oireachtas involvement. As democrats we accept what the people say. However, the planning process in this case leaves a sour taste. I do not want to stray into questioning the independence of the process. The roadmap this Government and the last one put forward contained a strategy for the development of Cork Harbour as the Sydney of Europe. Colleagues who are not from Cork do not understand the importance of the harbour and may see us as being very parochial. Being from Waterford, Senator Coffey will recognise the importance of the water as an entrance and departure point for trade and commerce, as will the Acting Chairman in respect of Dún Laoghaire. It is very disappointing for the residents of Ringaskiddy. There is only one further recourse left which costs an awful lot of money. One might wonder why we have a maritime strategy or a spatial planning strategy in terms of Ireland 2040.

In the context of flood relief and defence, I hope we can tie in the work of the OPW with the marine spatial planning strategy. It is about ensuring that we allow people to have access to the water, develop our ports and protect our people in the city of Cork from flooding. I thank the Minister of State and the Acting Chairman for indulging me. It was important to put on record my disappointment at what Indaver has been able to achieve through the planning process.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Damien English): I agree with some of the Senators that it is regrettable that we did not have this discussion before the legislation but I am not in charge of how this House orders its business. I am glad we had the chance to have the debate on the one day as it brings a lot of clarity to the concerns raised during discussion of the planning area earlier.

This process started in December 2017 with the launch of the roadmap by the Minister, Deputy Murphy, and I. It involved a lot of stakeholders and consultations for the years ahead. In my speech earlier, I set out how that consultation will go. I would be delighted to have Senators' involvement in that as well and thank all parties for facilitating tonight's debate. I thank Members for their interest in the marine spatial planning, MSP, process. I note their comments and look forward to engaging with them in more detail as the plan proceeds. I urge Members to remain involved and to channel their obvious commitment to our seas in their engagements with party colleagues and others. We want to engage with all the different groups, some of which have been mentioned today.

The involvement of the Marine Institute was mentioned. It is very much involved, including in the departmental working group in an advisory capacity, in an advisory group and also in providing scientific and technical support for the MSP process to my Department through a service-level agreement. We avail of its expertise in this process and in many other decisions made in the Department. It is central to everything we do here and I thank it for its role in all the work we do and in this area.

Likewise, the local authorities are rightly very much involved. Some have expressed a desire for even greater involvement in the development of the marine strategy and coastal areas. Some want to lead in these areas and I am very interested in having a discussion with them. Local authorities have representatives on the interdepartmental working group and the advisory group that I chair. Part of their role is to bring updates back to the local authority planning sections on a regular basis. We have asked all stakeholders involved in the advisory group and the interdepartmental working group to make sure to bring the message back out as part of their work. Some of them are national bodies with a lot of local members. I wish to put Senators' minds at rest that it is not just our Department. We are not controlling everything but are involving everybody as much as we possibly can.

The development of Ireland's first marine plan offers a unique opportunity. Just as the national planning framework will stand as a spatial expression of national policy for Ireland's terrestrial area, the MSP will set out the spatial expression of national policy for Ireland's marine area. We all value that here. The marine plan will cover Ireland's maritime area of approximately 490,000 sq. km., the second largest in the EU next to Portugal, including internal waters, the sea area, territorial seas, the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf. The maritime area extends from mean high water mark at the coast seaward to an axis of 200 nautical miles in parts. It is proposed that a single plan will be prepared for the entire area with the possibility of more detailed regional plans being made at a later date. The MSP will be a strategic document that will deal with, *inter alia*, the following environmental, social and economic issues: key marine activities such as fisheries, tourism, transport and offshore renewable energy; the generation of oil and gas exploration and production; aquaculture and how it interacts with both communities and other forms of life in the marine; climate change and related impacts; communities and health; cultural heritage; marine environment and biodiversity; and transboundary interactions with other jurisdictions as was raised in the debate today. My colleagues in the Department do engage with their colleagues in other jurisdictions to make sure

we are all thinking and planning in the same way and making marine strategies that will blend together and work at European level. We recognise Ireland's role in a European context and on the world stage when it comes to marine activity. We have a lot to contribute to this area and our input is valued. That comes at a cost to the taxpayer but I believe the taxpayers are happy that it is money well committed.

Ireland's marine areas are rich and, historically, have often been an under-appreciated asset. Their proper management affects everyone from fishermen to those in the adventure sector, new energy providers and recreational workers on our coastal paths. We need to hear from them all and I cannot stress enough that we do want that consultation. We are happy to extend the times as we have done in the past. There should not be any need to do so this time as we are setting out well in advance the process over the next two years from the organic, small scale awareness-raising being carried out at the moment to the more heavily-publicised public consultation periods and regional events that will follow, to the publication of the baseline report and the draft plan. There are mechanisms for stakeholder engagement with this plan that are fresh, innovative and truly direct. Sometimes they have involved role play also. I am conscious that it was only after we published the national planning framework that we got a lot more interest. There was a big discussion here on timelines because people did not get involved at an earlier stage. I hope that, this time, people will get involved at an early stage. We will do all we can to advertise it but we cannot drag people to the debate.

It is incumbent on us all to think of the sort of marine legacy we want to bequeath to the next generation. We need to create a framework for decision making that is consistent and evidence-based, to secure a sustainable future for the marine area. The scientific and technical support from the Marine Institute is very important in this regard for data and we will have various discussions around how we can fit everything in. It is possible to accommodate all needs but it must be based on evidence.

Concerns were raised relating to Cork Harbour but a decision-making process is in place, which is also based on evidence. We might not always like to believe the evidence but we have to use it as we develop our strategy. It is important we do this to secure a sustainable future for the marine area for all of us to enjoy long into the future and to create places and spaces in which people can live, work and enjoy themselves. Those who have an interest in this must now take this opportunity to have their say in the marine planning process. It is their plan and it will use the people's money.

Questions were raised about our work in Bantry Bay, about which I will not say too much as it is going through a legal and judicial process. This has spanned many Governments, though I will not go into who did what, where and when. There has been a lot of consultation over many years and I agree that if people have made the wrong decision it should be changed. I have no problem with that as Minister of State. The conditions of the licence are clear that if errors have been made, or if monitoring requirements are not met, the Minister can step in and make changes.

Bantry Bay is either 20,000 acres or 20,000 hectares but the licence covers some 800 acres so it is a small portion of the total area. There are controlled parts within that so we can monitor the baseline and the report deals with that. It is not a case of giving out a licence and forgetting about it; we are very conscious that any form of seaweed harvesting can be abused, whether it is mechanical or not. If it is not done correctly it can be unsustainable. I want to make sure this does not happen, whatever the method and wherever in the country it takes place. The Depart-

ment will monitor and control this. The residents have to take forward their process and I am happy for them to do so. We tried to engage with them at different stages and we will continue to do that but for now it is going through a legal process.

I assure the House that the decisions that were made were made in good faith and involved all the key experts. The decision is not made by one person in the Department or me as Minister of State. We look at the evidence, take advice on board and make informed decisions, which happened in this case.

Tourism Industry: Statements

Acting Chairman (Senator Gerry Horkan): We will start with the Minister of State. Group spokespersons will have eight minutes and all other Senators will have five minutes. It is open ended so the Minister of State will be called on to reply when no other Senators are offering.

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin): I welcome the opportunity to address the Seanad to speak about tourism. It is a vital industry in Ireland, one that is perhaps unique in that it reaches every part of the country. It is a sector that has, without doubt, made a very important economic contribution in recent years. I am sure that every Member of the House would concur with me on this point.

The year 2017 was another record-breaking year for overseas visits to Ireland and marked seven years of consecutive growth in overseas visitor numbers. This is a fantastic achievement given that 2016 was an exceptional year in its own right and particularly in view of the fall in visitor numbers from our largest market, Great Britain, which I will come back to later.

Overall in 2017, according to CSO data, there were over 9.9 million overseas visitors to Ireland, up 4% on 2016. They generated approximately €4.9 billion for our economy, up 6.5%. This figure rises to €6.5 billion if we include the fare receipts of Irish airlines and ferry companies. Domestic tourism was worth €1.9 billion in 2017, meaning the sector was worth approximately €8.4 billion to the economy in current expenditure alone in 2017. Fáilte Ireland estimates that the tourism and hospitality sector now supports about 235,000 jobs across the economy, or approximately one in ten jobs. We can sometimes think that numbers such as these are mere statistics but these are 235,000 individuals, households and families, with hopes and aspirations for the future and for whom their job is critically important. It is a huge achievement and I see no reason we cannot grow the figure even more in the future.

Initial data for 2018 indicate that we are continuing to grow our visitor numbers, with Europe and North America again performing strongly. The continued growth in visitor numbers reflects the ongoing efforts of the tourism agencies, in collaboration with the industry, to market Ireland at a range of markets with the highest revenue growth potential. Tourism Ireland focuses investment on the basis of market potential and continues to implement its market diversification strategy. Market diversification is a major factor contributing to our outstanding performance in 2017 as it targets markets proven to stay longer and spend more. The contribution of North American visitors in 2017 was over €1.5 billion, making it the second largest market for revenue behind mainland Europe. Remarkably, revenue from this vital market has more than doubled in the last five years, which has produced a lot of money for the Exchequer.

With the launch of the Global Ireland strategy by the Taoiseach earlier this week, we can look forward to continuing to grow tourism from a wide variety of markets. Why do tourists

come to Ireland? Research by Fáilte Ireland consistently shows that our people and our scenery and environment are the biggest draws for visitors to this country. That does not mean we can sit back and expect people to come because of those natural advantages. We operate in a very competitive international marketplace in tourism and the tourism agencies, Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland, do a great job both in marketing Ireland abroad and ensuring we are equipped to provide the type of experiences people want when they get here.

The brand experiences have turned into a real success story with the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East benefitting from growing international awareness. Dublin, as we know, is an iconic destination which attracts large numbers of visitors to experience city living side by side with the natural outdoors. Fáilte Ireland has further developed the approach this year with the launch of a new brand for the midlands, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, which I have no doubt will be a success in its own right. To help get the message out there, we invested an additional €2 million in Tourism Ireland this year for investment in its digital tourism marketing, both to help restore Ireland's share of voice *vis-à-vis* its competitors in the British market and also to develop growth from alternative markets.

The Government, through Fáilte Ireland, continues to support the expansion of the tourism experience on the ground in line with the relevant experience brands. Priority areas for tourism capital investment include the development and enhancement of tourist attractions and activities to provide the type and quality of experience that our visitors are seeking. Fáilte Ireland operates both large and small-scale capital grant schemes. It also has strategic partnerships with bodies such as the Office of Public Works, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Coillte to further develop our tourism assets. In addition, the agency invests directly in architecture, such as signage, for the brand experiences. Current investment in tourism provides for further enhancement, animation and promotion, allowing Fáilte Ireland to fund festivals, events and other programmes and to provide related business supports and training.

The forthcoming publication of a strategy for the future development of greenways will set out a framework by which we can develop more of these wonderful attractions around the country. I have seen at first hand how greenways can provide a boost to tourism in an area and I look forward to a time when we have a network of these facilities traversing the country. Last month, I had the great pleasure of doing the Waterford greenway with Senator Paudie Coffey, who was here a few moments ago. We were there on a Tuesday morning in early May. Seeing the level of economic activity in a rural area between Kilmacthomas and Dungarvan was remarkable. I remember writing a blog after finishing the Westport to Achill greenway in 2013, while sitting in the hotel on Achill Island. I wrote it under the heading, "Why Greenways should be called Goldways", because of the sheer level of economic activity that was taking place along the route of that greenway. I had visited three years earlier when it was a fledgling greenway and businesses were starting to get off the ground between Newport and Mulranny. Within three years, it had grown to be a great success and it has grown even further since. Greenways offer a great opportunity for the entire country and we need to grasp it.

As I mentioned, people are one of the reasons visitors come here. Having appropriately trained staff is extremely important for our tourism enterprises. For its part, Fáilte Ireland provides complementary tourism-related business development and training supports in line with its responsibility for encouraging, promoting and supporting tourism as a leading indigenous component of the economy. Furthermore, in line with the Tourism Action Plan 2016-2018, it is committed to working with the tourism industry and the wider education and training sector to implement recommendations contained in the report on future skills requirements in the

hospitality sector. In this regard, Fáilte Ireland participates in the hospitality skills oversight group, which oversees skills development and promotion in the sector, including monitoring the implementation of the expert group recommendations.

Despite the strong performance and success that I have outlined, we cannot be complacent about the future success of tourism. We are, as Senators know, heavily dependent on attracting tourism from outside Ireland. Anything that causes economic upheaval in our main source markets can have a detrimental effect on the industry here. I remember the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in 2001 and the severe impact it had on the tourism industry. I was working in Aghadoe Heights Hotel in Killarney as a porter on the morning of the attacks of 11 September 2001. The plan was to try to earn a few extra pounds - I think it was still pounds at the time - before going back to college two weeks later. I was back in college two days later because, effectively, the tourism season ended that morning. We need to be robust enough to deal with these shock events that happen, such as volcanic ash clouds.

One issue that has been on the horizon for the last two years is Brexit. The UK vote to leave the European Union caused considerable concern for the sector here. Brexit has yet to fully play out and its longer-term effects on tourism are difficult to gauge at this point without knowing what the final terms of the agreement will be. We know the initial effect was a 5% reduction in British visitors in 2017 as sterling weakened against the euro. Monitoring and responding to this is something that I have been closely involved in with Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and the tourism industry. We have put in place a number of measures to help counteract these initial effects, including the Wonders of the Wild Atlantic Way marketing programme earlier this year. I am pleased that visitor numbers from the UK have stabilised this year to date, although we only have four months of data at this point. While we have not returned to the figures recorded before the Brexit vote, the figures have stabilised and have risen slightly this year. The good news is that UK visitor numbers are no longer in decline and have turned a corner. The pre-Brexit figure should be our natural benchmark and the point to which we will fight to return. The British market is so important that we cannot afford to give up on it. It is a critical market for us. The proximity of the British market presents major opportunities but we need to fight hard for it.

Events such as Brexit highlight the importance of market diversification. The greater the variety of source markets that we have, the more resilient we will be in times of difficulty. We cannot be sure what the next economic or political shock will be but we can be ready by being adaptable enough to turn to newer markets where that is necessary. It is in everyone's interest that the tourism industry continues to grow. However, we must be conscious of the need to grow it in a sustainable way. This is an important part of the Government's tourism policy. This policy is implemented through tourism action plans, which are monitored by a tourism leadership group that includes industry representatives. The current tourism action plan covers the period from 2016 to 2018, and the tourism leadership group has concluded that most of the 23 actions are complete or nearly complete. Work is currently under way on drafting the next tourism action plan for the period from 2018 to 2020 and a number of workshops are being held to progress this.

The need to grow sustainably will be an overriding theme of the next action plan. Across the world, there is growing recognition that tourism needs to be sustainable. It needs to be environmentally sustainable and also economically and socially sustainable. We have seen to our cost in this country that growth for the sake of growth is not always desirable. We must also remain conscious of the need to maintain our competitiveness. Ireland is a location that

offers a great visitor experience and value for money. It would be a shame if increased demand for tourism-related services resulted in price inflation of a level which would see us losing that reputation again. It has happened before, as we all know, and we know the complete devastation that resulted from that previously. We need to avoid that at all costs in the future because jobs will be lost if that happens. That needs to be one of our key focuses.

Overall, we are in a very good place with tourism. The growth in recent years has been impressive and a major contributor to our ongoing recovery from the difficult times we experienced in the last decade. I am confident that, with the ongoing support of Government, we will continue to grow in a smart way that will mean that tourism reinforces itself as arguably our most important indigenous economic sector. The key issue is collaboration between Government, agencies, industry, the people working at the front line and local communities, with tourism that is built from the ground up, that is, from community level. It was viewed as the role of the State to provide tourism and everything related to it for too long. All over the country, I have seen the remarkable work led by people of individual communities. If we are to expand regionality and seasonality, we need to empower local communities to sell their communities and locations and the great stories and heritage they have. All parts of this island have fantastic heritage and each part has a great story to tell. The process of spreading regionality needs to be a key Government policy and one that empowers local communities throughout the island of Ireland. If we can do that, we will provide our future generations with an opportunity that many generations in the past did not have, namely, to stay in the part of the island that they love and in which they want to grow up, grow old and live their lives. Tourism, with other industries, gives us a great opportunity to achieve that and that is a goal worth fighting for.

Senator Gerry Horkan: I thank the Minister of State for his comprehensive opening statement. Eight Senators have indicated and they will contribute in the order they indicated. The first speaker will be Senator Ned O'Sullivan followed by Pádraig Ó Céidigh, Martin Conway, Grace O'Sullivan, Gabrielle McFadden, Joe O'Reilly, Anthony Lawlor and Maria Byrne. Senator Warfield may also wish to contribute.

Senator Ned O'Sullivan: I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Brendan Griffin. As a fellow Kerryman, I wish him well. We have much in common and naturally I support many of the points he made. Tourism is a good news story and long may it remain so. Like all good news stories, it has to be minded and nurtured because it has its pitfalls as well as its upside. It would, however, be churlish not to welcome the figures the Minister has presented us with. We cannot overestimate the importance of the fact that we are now in our seventh successive year of growth in tourism and I am glad the last Fianna Fáil-led Government is included in that seven years. We are often forgotten for being the originators of The Gathering, which has been one of the most inspiring projects in recent Irish tourism development. Well done to the current Government for capturing the Fianna Fáil idea and developing it well.

I also give credit where it is due to other recent initiatives, such as the Wild Atlantic Way, which has been brilliant. I also welcome Ireland's Ancient East and the new promotion in the midlands as they are all important.

Senator Anthony Lawlor: They were yours as well, I suppose.

Senator Ned O'Sullivan: We have to keep coming up with new initiatives because we cannot rest on our laurels. There are many reasons people come to Ireland to visit and the Minister referred to a few of them. Essentially, it comes down to the Irish people and the traditional

céad míle fáilte. We like people, we want people and we welcome people and we treat them properly 99% of the time. They get a fair deal and they go home to America, or wherever they came from, with a feeling of having achieved something, whether that is relaxation or a more spiritual thing, which is part of the experience. They see how we live, our music, our dance and our games and we have to support all these things with financial help.

The biggest worry for everybody is the decline in the British tourist spend, which is not dramatic but is a decline nonetheless. British and Northern Ireland tourism accounts for up to 40% of the total tourism spend so it is a huge segment of the market. It is under threat, like everything else, from Brexit and I know the Minister and the Department are well aware of his. The priorities have to be to preserve the common travel area, avoid a hard border and maintain an open aviation regime. Hopefully the British will come to their senses. It has taken a long time to do so but somehow I think the penny is beginning to drop. I hope our Government can manage Brexit to the best advantage of our country and for the advantage of all of Europe, including Britain itself.

The figures are worrying. I do not have the figures for the first quarter of this year but I would be very interested to know the figures for British tourism for that period. I would also like to know the figures for American tourism for the first four months of the year. I suspect the figures are up but I have heard that there is a continuing softening in the British spend in the south west, where I and the Minister of State are from. If it is happening in the south west, it is probably happening in Dublin too, and around the country.

We refer to diversification every year in our speeches on tourism and they are almost single transferable speeches at this stage. The Asian market is huge and even if we get the slightest increase it would be of great significance. Long-haul travellers from the East are good tourists because, having travelled so far, they spend longer here and travel around more to visit more of the country than those who come for a week or less. The data are vague on these travellers, though I know the Department is trying to improve this. A former president of the Irish Hotels Federation famously said that we know more about the travel patterns of the 6.8 million cows on this island than we do of the 6.5 million visitors who come to our shore each year. Information is strength.

Senator Anthony Lawlor: Is the Senator suggesting we tag tourists?

Senator Ned O'Sullivan: We need to know why Chinese people want to come to Ireland and what their travel patterns are but we do not have enough data on it.

I welcome the take-up of tourism promotion on the part of local authorities. When I was a county councillor we were always trying to get management in Kerry to be more hands-on and proactive in promoting tourism in the county. We are an easy county to promote because we have nature's bounty in our mountains, rivers and lakes but it is only in recent years that councils have got in on the game. Great work has been done in Kerry under the work of Joan McCarthy and her team, and Moira Murrell, the county manager. It seems that other counties are getting with the programme too, though I heard an anecdote this morning about a county manager in the midlands whose councillors wanted him to promote tourism, to whom he replied "This county is not Kerry". I will not name the county. We cannot all be Kerry and we cannot all be as fortunate as the Minister and myself to be born in County Kerry but one has to be more positive than the county manager.

Deputy Brendan Griffin: It is an awful responsibility.

Senator Ned O'Sullivan: As John B. Keane said, it is an awful responsibility to be a Kerryman. On the question of regionalisation, 40% of our tourism is made up of the Dublin market while the next strongest is the south west, with 19%, while the west is at 13% and the poor north west is at about 5%, which I cannot understand. I know that infrastructure and bad roads are a reason and I was pretty shocked at how long it took me to get back to Dublin from Ballina recently, where I had been attending a funeral. We have to watch that because tourism needs to be spread over the whole country.

The overpricing of hotels in Dublin is atrocious, especially when there is a big event on in Croke Park or the O2. We are putting ourselves out of the market and will kill the goose that lays the golden egg. Finally, I ask the Minister to continue to ensure we have the skills we need. There was a shortage of 5,000 chefs at the last count and we have a shortage of training kitchens, something which hotel managers tell us when we go out for a meal at night.

Senator Pádraig Ó Céidigh: Tá fáilte roimh an Aire Stáit os comhair na Seanadóirí. Tá mé an-bhuíoch dó as ucht an cur i láthair a rinne sé. I echo everything Senator Ned O'Sullivan said and he made some really important points. The numbers on tourism are very good and it is a great success. This is down to everybody concerned but, in particular, it is down to the staff in Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland, who have done Trojan work to develop tourism in Ireland. I was on the board of Fáilte Ireland for a number of years and the effort, commitment, and passion they had and have is absolutely fantastic and we are well served by civil servants.

There were 9.9 million overseas visitors, though the numbers from the UK are down a little. To look at it in purely financial terms, the tax revenue the Irish State gets from tourism is almost €2 billion a year. Some €1.5 billion comes from foreign tourists, so it is critically important for our country. The Minister of State's Department also deals with transport and sport and that is the budget the whole ministry has so it is very important that we do this right, which we do in many areas.

I know the Minister is passionate about tourism and I support him in this area but there are a couple of areas which we should look at. We need, however, to look at the big picture and at where we want to go in tourism. What is our big plan and our strategy and where do we want to be in ten or 20 years' time? What kind of a destination do we want our country to be in ten to 20 years? The Minister of State rightly mentioned our people. The people are at the core of everything we do, particularly from a tourism point of view. Fáilte Ireland has identified this. Visitors come to our shores because of the experience and it is the people who give them the experience. They might go to Florida or other places for a different type of an experience they call Disneyland, but what we have here in Ireland is the real McCoy. As the Minister of State said, let us empower communities to continue to develop what they have done on the Wild Atlantic Way and in other areas. That was visionary from Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland in marketing Ireland worldwide fairly recently.

Transport is a big issue. Metro north is critically important, but I ask that is not done through Scoil Caitríona and the Na Fianna GAA club up along St. Mobhi Road because that community needs to survive as well.

I have a concern and I suggest to the Minister of State, Deputy Griffin, that it be addressed. Dublin Airport is growing at a rate of knots, but what about the strategy for Cork Airport, Shan-

non Airport and the Minister of State's own airport in Kerry? That is hugely important. The Minister of State emphasised the importance of regionality. Airports are, as he will be aware, a key access point for an island community such as ours. In the past month or so, Dublin Airport announced 14 new services plus four new airlines to start serving Dublin Airport, including services to Hong Kong and Beijing. If we are looking for Chinese and eastern tourists coming in there, that is very significant growth. I have a concern, however, about what is happening in the other regions and whether we are creating a situation where everything in terms of the economy is being pushed into Dublin, which is not necessarily good for Dublin Airport or for Dublin as a capital city. We should have a good regional strategy that supports the Shannon, Cork, Kerry and Knock airports.

I will not go back over what was said in any detail about skills but there is a huge shortage in staff skills. There are 150,000 people employed directly in the tourism sector, and between full and part-time, 225,000 people in total are employed. If there are roughly 2 million people in full employment, 11% or 12% of the total employed are employed in tourism.

I mentioned originality and my concern about being too focused. Another area of concern is the majority of these businesses are small and medium-sized, SME, businesses, as the Minister of State will know well in Kerry. We in Galway and other parts of Ireland are trying to emulate the success that Kerry has created. There was significant collaboration in Kerry between everybody directly and indirectly involved in tourism. We need to model the rest of the country on that as much as we possibly can. The bed and breakfast sector needs significant focus. These are very small businesses with, normally, a husband and wife and maybe the family involved. They do not have the resources to market their bed and breakfast in any real effective way. They are a very important part of the future of tourism in Ireland, especially when we are talking about experiences and engagement with people, as highlighted by the Minister of State and by Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland.

Another area of concern in the tourism sector is that we need more joined-up thinking, not in the Department but in other Departments, in the kind of supports that are available across sectors, in particular, for the tourism sector. My feedback from the sector is that it does not quite understand what is available, what is not available, how it is available and how they employ. That needs a co-ordinated approach and I would appreciate it if the Minister of State would consider that.

Another area is foreign exchange. Brexit, the devaluation of the British currency and the effect of that on tourism from the UK was mentioned. In fact, the number of American and European tourists is increasing significantly. British tourism numbers are down since Brexit, but there is evidence that a number of tourists are choosing Ireland instead of the UK who would have gone to the UK in the past. There is some silver lining there for us. As the Minister of State says, we cannot be complacent. We have to give this 110% because the tourism sector is one of the most important, if not the most important, sectors in the country because of the number of SMEs and the number of part-time jobs. As the Minister of State said, when he was in college in Galway, and this happened to all of us, he was making the few bob working during the summer. There are the chances and opportunities as well as the personal development one gets in engaging with foreign tourists and the confidence it gives.

Senator Martin Conway: I find myself in agreement with the overall thrust of what my colleagues, the two previous speakers, have said. In the first instance, it is two years since we held a discussion on tourism in the House and it is good that the Minister of State, Deputy Griff-

fin, is here. I cannot think of anybody in the Houses of the Oireachtas who is more suitable to the role of tourism Minister. He has character, intelligence, great wit and great charm. He epitomises everything that is good about the west and County Kerry, and that is what we need going abroad. I welcome him formally to this House to talk to us in his capacity as Minister with responsibility for tourism about what is the jewel in our economic crown as far as I am concerned.

We have had a recession for the past decade but the sector that has continued to grow in those difficult years has been tourism. Our natural resource is not oil, steel or anything like that. It is our céad míle fáilte, our landscape, our scenery and our unique character as a people. It is what we are and it is what defines us that attracts the world to our shores.

Much has happened. The Wild Atlantic Way is a classic example of what we can achieve when we work together and pull all the various strands together in a focused international marketing effort. Prior to the Wild Atlantic Way, we had Clare competing with Kerry, Kerry competing with Cork and all of us competing with Connacht. Now what we have is all of us working together, telling the people of the world to come to Ireland and walk, cycle, drive or stay on our Wild Atlantic Way. Up until then, there was the Camino, which is very beautiful, but I would suggest that the Wild Atlantic Way is as beautiful and has as much to offer. In many ways it has much more to offer because we have character, energy, tradition, culture, music, the spoken word, stories, seanchaí, fairies and shamrocks. We have what people want. We have an experience that is weatherproof. People do not come to Ireland for the sunshine. They come to Ireland for all of the above. They come here to experience what is different and unique about Ireland.

There is much that needs to be done to improve it. I agree with Senator Ned O'Sullivan and others that chefs pose a big problem. We need joined-up thinking between the Departments of the Ministers of State, Deputy Griffin and Deputy Halligan, to put programmes in place to ensure that the restaurants stay open seven days a week. There are restaurants in my area that could only open at weekends last summer because they could not get chefs to work the other days. We need to look at that. That is a challenge.

The rip-off republic is back. There is no point in saying otherwise. People are greedy. Human nature, unfortunately, creates a certain greed in individuals. We have seen it. Five or six years ago, many of us from the country who come to Dublin to work were getting rooms for €40 or €50 a night. It is now €140 or €150. The reality is somewhere in between but it certainly is not €150 a night in the dead of winter when there is nothing much happening in the city. That needs to be looked at. We need to ensure that the people who work at the coalface of tourism are trained to the highest possible standard in customer service. In particular, we must ensure that they understand the uniqueness of this country and what attracts people here. We must ensure that they are trained and equipped to wear the green jersey. We also need to ensure that standards are kept at an acceptable level across the various suites of accommodation. I do not know if a particular standard applies to holiday homes, for example, as applies to bed and breakfast accommodation and hotels that have a star rating.

Airbnb needs to be regulated. There are some unscrupulous owners of desperate kips who offer Airbnb accommodation and rip-off unsuspecting decent people who come here to experience what is good here. Unfortunately, people end up in terrible accommodation because the Airbnb website is unmanaged and unregulated. Many thousands of people offer a high-quality service on Airbnb but, unfortunately, a minority do not offer accommodation that is up to the

standard that we expect when we go abroad, and that we want this country to offer people who are good enough to visit Ireland.

Capital funding needs to be significantly increased so that we can offer tourism projects year around and which are weather resistant. There are lots of wonderful interpretive centres in this country but we need more, and we need more variety. Let us say somebody travels to County Clare for a week. I believe there should be enough indoor activities available during the day to occupy people and compliment everything that is provided in the evening by the people who work in the hospitality industry. There are challenges but the good news is that 9.9 million people chose to visit this country in 2017. I have no doubt that that figure will increase in 2018 and that it will continue to increase.

We need the people in the private sector who work in the tourism sector to be flexible because we are an island nation and, therefore, we will be affected by international circumstances whatever they may be. I recall that in 2001 the Minister spoke about his experiences in terms of the 9/11 attacks. One business lesson that I learned was from Mr. Mark Nolan and his team in Dromoland Castle. The morning after the terrorist attacks in New York the castle switched its entire marketing budget for America to Europe and mainland Britain. As a result, the hotel was full that year and for the next two years simply because the castle was flexible enough to move its budget and react to international circumstances. That is what must happen with an island nation. We cannot be entrenched and need to be totally flexible.

Earlier Senator Ó Céidigh spoke about airports and I agree with him that they are extremely important. I believe we should consider arranging public service obligations between Ireland and other European countries that have connectivity throughout the world. Therefore, an airline could buy into a PSO arrangement between Kerry Airport and Stansted Airport or another hub thus allowing millions of passengers to travel. We need to think outside the box and be creative. The Gathering initiative and the creation of the Wild Atlantic Way were examples of thinking outside the box. We need to continue such thinking because tourism is the one industry that is somewhat recession proof, will create thousands of jobs and is a natural resource.

Senator Grace O'Sullivan: I welcome the Minister of State and it is great to see him back in the Seanad. It is great to hear that tourist numbers are up. Ireland, as an island nation, has something to offer tourists. As has been said, people come here not only to see this country's natural beauty but they also come for the culture, heritage, pub life and everything else that is available here.

I would like to discuss slow tourism. Fáilte Ireland has plans to develop slow tourism in Ireland in terms of lakes and waterways. However, it is imperative that people who come here for a cycling holiday have good transport and cycling networks across Ireland. At present this country is part of the EuroVelo route. That means people can come from the UK, the Netherlands, Spain or France with their bicycles and they can cycle. If they have arrived in Rosslare Harbour they can cycle along the EuroVelo route, which is fantastic. We, as a nation, must embrace the opportunity to become part of European initiatives that will help, like Senator Conway has mentioned, to provide creative and innovative options for tourists.

Yesterday, I was delighted to be invited to attend a heritage day in a rural village called Larha in north Tipperary. The village has incredible heritage and the inhabitants from the village and its surrounding area are delighted to be part of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. The village is located between the M6 and M7 motorways and so it is a little bit off the beaten track. These

small rural communities will create mechanisms that allow them to grow their tourism offerings if the signposting is good and there is sufficient support provided. If the Minister of State had been at the heritage day yesterday he would have experienced the ancient castles, etc., in beautiful sunshine. That is just one of many rural areas that needs support in order to develop and have something to offer tourists.

I would like to draw the Minister of State's attention to the skills deficit in terms of cross-departmental work. As other colleagues have said, there is a shortage of 5,000 chefs in the hospitality sector at present, which has put a lot of strain not only on large hospitality offerings but on small family-run businesses. The latter must compete with larger hotels to attract chefs. I suggest that an apprenticeship or a buddy system is put in place. In the old days a chef could avail of a buddy system whereby one person would assist him or her until certain skills were developed. In other words, chefs learned *in situ*. Perhaps we could view apprenticeships as taking place in institutes of technology and in the catering sector when there is a dire shortage of certain staff. Such a scheme would be a pathway for people to become skilled chefs or alleviate areas wherever a skills deficit has been identified.

I want to talk about the beautiful beaches in this country, particularly ones that have been awarded a blue flag. We are lucky to be experiencing a big influx of tourists who come here for many reasons, including to surf, for birdwatching, cycling or just to see the scenery.

I ask that the number of lifeguards be assessed to make sure there are sufficient numbers on the beaches around Ireland, in particular during high season, and that people are safe when using beaches. I also ask the Minister of State to liaise with the Department of Education and Skills as water safety skills should be a mandatory part of the primary school curriculum. I am thinking of the big picture in developing a significant pool of young school leavers who would know what to do in the event that they or someone in the community gets into difficulty in the water. It would also help in making sure people who come here to enjoy our tourism offering would be protected.

The Minister of State referred to the Deise Greenway in County Waterford. Between March and September 2017 it received approximately 250,000 visitors, of whom 141,906 cycled and 105,639 walked the greenway, of whom 94% said their overall perception was either excellent or good, 70% mentioned that they liked the scenery and nature, 51% said they liked being away from traffic, 36% talked about the peace and quiet and 18% referred to friendliness. It is a major success for County Waterford, but we need to keep the momentum going and get small businesses to support it in order that it will not be a once-off wonder. The Government should invest in it to make sure it will be sustainable into the future.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: Cuirim fáilte roimh an Aire Stáit. Tréaslaím leis an mhéid atá ráite ag cuid mhaith de na cainteoirí a labhair romham. Is féidir linn bheith iontach dearfach faoin ábhar seo.

The Minister of State is most welcome to the Seanad and I welcome the opportunity to engage with him on tourism. I will begin by focusing on the important and valuable work done by Tourism Ireland to promote the country overseas. Tourism Ireland has the great benefit of being able to promote Ireland as a single entity. It is able to promote the diversity of all of the great assets which have been mentioned, including the Giants Causeway, the Game of Thrones Trail, Titanic Belfast and the Peace Bridge in Ebrington Square in Derry. For me, tourism is a glaringly obvious example of where Ireland works best when it works together. I take the

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opportunity to commend the chief executive of Tourism Ireland, Mr. Niall Gibbons, and his staff both here and all around the world who do a fantastic job in drawing tourists and visitors not just to the well-known iconic attractions but also some of the smaller and, I dare say, more authentic experiences across the island. I wish to get a plug in for the community arts festival which is taking place in west Belfast, Féile an Phobail. The programme was launched last week by the Taoiseach in St. Mary's University College on the Falls Road. I commend the festival to the Minister of State. I have a copy of the clár in my office and will make sure to leave it in the Minister of State's pigeonhole in order that he can read it. I am sure I am not speaking out of turn when, on behalf of the organisers and management of Féile an Phobail, I extend a very warm invitation to him to come to the festival to see what is on offer.

I wish to hone in on an issue that cuts across briefs within the Minister of State's Department. We recently saw the launch of joint plans to promote connectivity and positive working between Translink and Iarnród Éireann. Plans were outlined for the much talked about high-speed rail service connecting Belfast and Dublin, an hourly service which would reduce travel time to about 1.5 hours. Has the Minister of State had any engagement with either of the organisations on the tourism benefits? I understand the benefits will be much broader, but tourism will be a central plank of the benefits which will flow from the project. If the Minister of State has not done so, he might consider having a conversation with the two organisations, particularly given the impending threat posed by Brexit. We need to put infrastructure in place and improve the infrastructure which has served us reasonably well up to this point.

Given all of the statistics outlined by the Minister of State, we should punch well above our weight. We need to meet demand by having a world-class professional service which is what people expect when they visit Ireland. I am keen to hear the views of the Minister of State in that regard. On behalf of the Government, the previous Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade declared publicly his support for the project. I would like to hear that there has been some movement in that regard.

I appreciate that we are here somewhat later than normal on a Tuesday, but behind all of the fantastic and proud statistics we are able to recite about the benefits of tourism to the economy and broader society, there are people working in the hospitality sector and elsewhere in the State who find their employment to be very precarious, unstable and low paid. That is why it is important that we continue to lend our support to Senator Paul Gavan's Bill which seeks to make it illegal for employers to take tips from persons working in the hospitality sector.

As a member of the board of Visit Belfast and during my time as Lord Mayor of Belfast, I placed major emphasis on tourism within the city. The Minister of State is absolutely correct. We do not need *National Geographic* or anyone else to tell us that our best tourism asset is the people. If we are going to continue to provide a first-class service and utilise the people as the wonderful tourism asset that they are, we also need to care for and look after them when working in the sector and ensure it is a viable and sustainable career such that they will have a good decent living wage and that there will be an opportunity, as Senator Grace O'Sullivan said, to bring young people into the industry. I do not say this to be combative or confrontational. While it is easy for us to hone in on the many positives, there can be a darker edge to the industry which many workers experience. I encourage people never to lose sight of that fact.

Senator Gabrielle McFadden: I welcome the Minister of State. As has been said, 2017 was the best year ever for tourism, with record numbers of visitors and expenditure. They followed the previous records in 2016 and 2015. In fact, tourist numbers and expenditure have

grown every year since 2012. Last year, excluding fares, foreign tourists delivered expenditure of €1,021 for each man, woman and child in the economy. Total employment in tourism is estimated to be in the region of 235,000, while wages in the sector have increased by 11% in the past five years, compared to an increase of 7% in the economy as a whole. This is reflected in institutions such as Athlone Institute of Technology which has a thriving hospitality department which offers a diploma in restaurant management, an advanced certificate in professional cooking and a bachelor of arts degree in hotel and leisure management. This has significance for the country and did not happen by accident.

Following the change of Government in 2011, tourism was set as a priority area for growth and plans and initiatives were put in place to bring this about. Tourism is a native industry and growth in tourism leads to a direct and immediate growth in employment. For a number of years before this, the Fianna Fáil Government had taken its eye off the ball. While chasing after the builders and bankers, it let tourism numbers decline year on year. The Fine Gael-led Government in May 2011 introduced a jobs initiative which included a reduced VAT rate for the hospitality sector. This decision to focus on employment and on tourism as a driver has marked a turnaround in jobs and in tourist numbers which has continued to this day. Hoteliers, particularly in the larger cities, must respect this VAT rate they have been given when it comes to the price of hotel rooms.

We should not forget, of course, the importance of proper marketing in growing tourist numbers. Initiatives such as the Wild Atlantic Way and The Gathering of 2013, both introduced by the then Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, the Taoiseach, Deputy Leo Varadkar, have played a huge part in the recovery of tourism and the economy in general. With this success, we must focus on ensuring that the annually increasing numbers of tourists get to see more than just Dublin and the west coast, and that they are led to other parts of the island where there is also much to offer.

Marketing is important at a local level also. When I was elected mayor of Athlone in 2013, I outlined a vision that I had for my town, including the concept of Destination Athlone, which has been very successful in putting the town on the map. It is now without doubt the beating heart of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. Athlone is positioned between Dublin and Galway and acts as a gateway to the west and north west. We are at a meeting point for road, river, rail and greenway, and for counties and provinces. We have a social and cultural infrastructure unrivalled in the region. We can claim to be the original source of whiskey and we are fast becoming one of Ireland's food capitals. Those familiar with Athlone will know the left bank area around Athlone Castle which is thriving with pubs and restaurants. My latest initiative is to extend this further by rejuvenating the west side of Athlone and making it a cultural and tourist quarter that can rival any.

There is no shortage of opportunity for further development of tourism in Ireland. We must ensure that we are not limited by lack of imagination or sidetracked by naysayers. There are plenty of people who mocked The Gathering and the concept of the Wild Atlantic Way, but there is nobody who can honestly argue against their success in driving Ireland as a tourist destination and playing a major part in rebuilding our economy. Let us all support those who are positive and let us work with the dreamers. It is through positivity and vision that we can grow this sector further and spread it out more evenly, whether that is at a national level or in my native Athlone, which everybody knows to be the centre of the universe.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: I join in the welcome to my friend and colleague, the Minister of

State, Deputy Griffin. We are delighted to have him in the House. He has been very successful in his Ministry to date and I have no doubt he has the capacity to go on being successful there and in a range of Ministries for many years. It is good to have him here today to discuss this very important sector.

The figures are very positive on a number of fronts in regard to tourism and I want to note the importance of tourism by way of introduction. There were 2 million visitors in the first quarter of the year, a 6.9% increase on the equivalent period the previous year, and there are two significant details regarding that figure, namely, the number of North American visitors is up 13% and the number of visitors from mainland Europe is up 13.8%. In 2017, there were 9.9 million visits in total. Overall, there are 235,000 jobs in the sector which has revenue of €2 billion a year. It is a vital and growing sector and one that needs nourishment and minding.

I want to mention one or two facets of the sector in the short time I have available. First, value for money is crucial. The VAT reduction to 9% was a very successful initiative in the tourism sector has had huge job implications and has been one of the greatest initiatives for the economy in recent times. However, it is being abused. The prices in hotels in Dublin certainly are astronomical and we have to watch this kind of pricing. I suggest to the Minister of State that he would keep strong vigilance in this area and, insofar as he can, achieve regulation and control, even using the threat of removing or changing the VAT rate if necessary to bring order to that area. If we price ourselves out of tourism, it would be a great tragedy.

Another issue that merits monitoring is the entire Brexit arena. The obvious objectives are, of course, to have no hard border and to try to deal with sterling fluctuations. In that regard, it is important that we support the tourism sector across counties like Cavan and Monaghan and along the Border and that the Minister of State is conscious of this issue. Those areas are under threat, first, from a potential hard border, which, please God, will not happen and is something we should all fight collectively to avoid, and second, from the very real threat of the sterling factor, especially the Northern Ireland dimension of trade in Cavan and Monaghan, for example, from Northern Ireland visitors, wedding groups and so on.

Infrastructure is critical, whether bed and breakfast accommodation, hotels or otherwise. I should declare a family interest in this area but I can sincerely say I raise the issue solely as a public representative. There is also the question of the rural pub, which is an important part of our tourism product. Pubs have been a focal point for Ireland and its tourism product and I am concerned to ensure they are not totally eliminated. It is an area that needs to be looked at, even in terms of examining pub facades and layout. Pubs are an important part of the product, as are bed and breakfast establishments and hotels. We need good product.

We need to spread the visitors throughout the country. While it is important that visitors are in all the hotspots, we need to spread them out to places like Cavan and Monaghan in my constituency. County Cavan has many products, for example, the Cavan Burren park, the museum, Killykeen forest and the UNESCO geopark. There is a great range of restaurants, a unique angling product and a number of woodland and forest areas. In Monaghan there is the whole cultural heritage aspect around Patrick Kavanagh and so many other facets, including Farney country music festival. There is a huge product there that needs to be developed and supported. It is very important to get tourists into the regions so tourism is not limited to a few parts of Ireland. While that is not completely the case, we need to develop the regions. I am delighted my county of Cavan is now part of the new initiative, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, and is also part of the eastern area. I hope that can all be developed.

I agree with the remarks on skill sets. The education and training boards, ETBs, should be marshalled in this regard because we have to ensure staff are available in the hospitality sector. We must diversify constantly and develop new product, and we need to continue to up our game. To finish where I started, it is important we do not price ourselves out of the market.

Acting Chairman (Senator Gerry Horkan): I know the Senator was going to also include the Cavan County Museum, given I heard great reports about it recently. It is a great facility.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: Yes, it is excellent.

Senator Anthony Lawlor: It is my pleasure to welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Griffin. I am sure he was thrilled when he was appointed Minister of State with responsibility for tourism and sport.

Acting Chairman (Senator Gerry Horkan): I am sure we all welcomed him.

Senator Anthony Lawlor: Having been a former five-a-side player in the past, I am sure he has enjoyed the sport side of it.

I want to focus on a couple of points. To start with employment, the worry for me is that while we have 235,000 employed in the tourism sector and we are constantly looking for growth there, it is a question of how we will recruit going forward. It is not about the specialist parts. It is about the staff who work behind the bars and counters in all our tourist venues. I am finding that we are heading back to where we were in the Celtic tiger era, when there were more and more non-Irish working in the facilities. That is a worrying concern for me because as has been said a number of times many tourists come here for the Irish people and the Irish welcome.

A number of months ago, the apprenticeship for commis chefs was finally agreed upon. One of the block release centres for that is in the Minister of State's own constituency in Tralee. There are another three areas that were also announced five years ago, pastry chefs, sous chefs and other ones, but they have not been advanced. The Minister of State might be able to talk to his colleagues in the areas of education and employment about moving those apprenticeships on a little bit quicker. It is where we need to go in the future.

Sport tourism has not really been mentioned and is a potential growth area. My own constituency of Kildare is the focal point of the equine industry. If we look at Punchestown, there was 125,000 people there for the festival this year of whom 25% were from overseas, mostly from the UK. That is an area we have not really looked at. Can we bring in people for rugby or soccer camps, the novelty event of hurling camps or other types of event? Irish golf has marketed itself quite well as a good destination for overseas tourists. It could be a growth area.

The Wild Atlantic Way is one of the best things ever done along with the reduction in the VAT rate to encourage people to come and use hospitality. What I love is to link locally between restauranteurs, farmers and local suppliers. The more we can encourage that, the better. It brings a whole community effort together. It is not all about this fancy food which sometimes drives me insane. Most people like a good steak and a few spuds and that type of quality food is what we are great at producing.

I am going to be a bit parochial. There are two man-made waterways going through County Kildare, the Royal Canal and the Grand Canal. They are excellent facilities. I have been talking about this for five or six years. They should be upgraded. They are linking Dublin with the

Shannon in the Longford area and south of Athlone. The Minister of State mentioned capital investment. They are two facilities that have plans. There are Part VIII applications coming out in respect of the Grand Canal shortly. The Minister of State could be instrumental in putting some capital investment into those projects which would be a great resource. We have seen investment in the greenways in Waterford and Achill but the midlands could do with something like that too, to generate employment in areas that are finding it difficult.

The second most visited tourist spot with free entry is Castletown House. About ten years ago it was a wreck and huge investment was put into it by the OPW. The number of tourists coming into it now is fantastic. There are hidden gems in the country that we still have not identified. We need to invest more in the capital side of things but we are certainly on the right road. We have had seven years of growth in the tourism industry. It is amazing. Fine Gael has been in power for seven years.

Senator Maria Byrne: I welcome the fact that there are over 200,000 people in employment to do with tourism. I agree with colleagues in respect of some of the abuse of the 9% VAT rate. Many cities, towns and rural areas are not abusing the system and find it very useful in terms of employment. However, certainly in Dublin it needs to be monitored. I am volunteering this weekend in Dublin with Special Olympics Ireland. I looked for a rate in a few of the hotels and I would not like to tell colleagues some of the quotes I was given. We are going to outprice ourselves in the tourism sector.

The Wild Atlantic Way has been mentioned a lot. Back in 2006, we also launched the Shannon Estuary drive and the Burren drive but we do not hear very much about them nowadays. They were links to try to encourage inward tourism attractions off the Wild Atlantic Way to benefit places like Ennis and Limerick. We have had increased numbers in King John's Castle. When the current Taoiseach was Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport he put a lot of investment into the castle, which had not received investment for many years. They did a fantastic job renovating it and numbers have trebled there, which is to be welcomed. We need to look at niche things like the Shannon Estuary drive and the Burren drive in terms of linking up the bigger projects. Those initiatives for inward tourism links need to be looked at by the Minister of State's Department and linked with Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland.

There was another initiative where visitors were given a passport and with every 20 tourism attractions they visited, there was a draw for something like an overnight stay in a hotel along one of the routes. That was launched as an incentive to get people to visit our heritage sites. A lot of people do not appreciate what they have on their own doorsteps and have not gone to visit some of those sites. It would be good if we had an incentive to encourage people at the weekends, during the summer time or whatever to visit heritage sites and tourism attractions. The OPW introduced free entry for children to its heritage sites at one stage, which I compliment. I would encourage many tourism attractions to give free admittance to children under ten. It can work out quite expensive to visit an attraction with a big family.

Skills shortages is an issue dear to my heart and I have raised it on many occasions in this House. Some of my colleagues have stated that there needs to be more joined-up thinking between education and tourism in terms of the creation of chef positions and so on. The issue of the licence also needs to be looked at. For non-Irish chefs, they have to bring a uniqueness to get a permit to work here but they are not considered to be unique. There is a huge shortage of chefs and we need Department officials in the areas of jobs, trade, tourism and education to come together to examine initiatives enabling people to go out and work. There is no point in

us bringing tourists in if we cannot give them the level of service they require.

I compliment the Minister of State. He has hit the ground running and is very much on top of his brief. I encourage him to consider initiatives to encourage the smaller routes as well as the main routes.

Senator Jerry Buttmer: I thank the Minister of State, Deputy Brendan Griffin, for being here and the strategic leadership he is showing in the Department. I do not want to be patronising when I say it is important for any Minister in any position to have passion, knowledge and a feel for his or her brief. I think the Minister of State has demonstrated that he has these qualities in abundance in his tourism and sport portfolios, as there has been a clear move within the Department in the past 12 months. There has been a reflection on the tourist experience as one that is visitor-led. There has been an emphasis on ensuring we are open for business.

The Minister of State, who is a Kerryman, is always welcome when he comes to Cork to launch various initiatives. I hope he and Senator Ned O'Sullivan will not leave Páirc Uí Chaoimh with a cup in two weeks' time. As someone who comes from Munster and Cork, it is important that we market Cork as a single destination. We need to recognise that it is a gateway to the south and initiatives such as Ireland's Ancient East and the Wild Atlantic Way. The national tourism policy, People, Place and Policy - Growing Tourism to 2025, is the basis that underpins everything we are doing. The figures show that there has been a significant increase in tourism footfall in Cork. This growth must be met by realism.

Senator Maria Byrne and others have touched on the shortage of chefs. Many of us who were in the Seanad in previous years did not want to see the closure of the training centres in Cork and Limerick. It can now be seen that the decision taken at the time was wrong.

The VAT rate issue is of concern to many. We must incentivise those involved in the tourism, hospitality and catering sectors to continue to employ and provide an array of food and artisan products such as craft beer. It is about the visitor experience.

Fáilte Ireland has stated there is no iconic visitor attraction in the city of Cork, but our tourism product is about more than having an iconic visitor attraction. It is also about the sense of place we can offer. It is about the visitor experience which includes shopping, food and the night-time economy. It is about being able to move beyond the city to explore parts of west, east and north Cork.

There is fear in certain quarters as a result of Norwegian's decision to suspend its winter flights between Cork and Providence. I commend the Minister because he was in Cork two weeks ago when the first Air France flight landed. It symbolises growth and accessibility. When we spoke about the sale of Aer Lingus, many of us were worried that we would lose the service between Cork and London, but that has not happened. I have written to the Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport to ask for representatives of Norwegian and the Dublin Airport Authority to come before the committee to explain the current position. We cannot allow Dublin to cannibalise or monopolise at the expense of everywhere else. I met my good friend, Councillor O'Connell, today when he was in Leinster House. He spoke about flying from Dublin to County Kerry. We lost the connectivity between Cork and Dublin, partly because of the completion of the motorway but also because of what Ryanair did.

As I know that time is against us, I will make two brief points before I conclude. I would like to mention two very good organisations in Cork. The Cork Convention Bureau is generat-

ing business tourism worth €70 million a year. I commend Mr. Seamus Heaney for the work he is doing to attract conferences and different types of event. Ms Ursula Morish of Visit Cork, a strategic tourism agency for Cork, is involved in the Pure Cork brand, the aim of which is to attract people to Cork and promote Cork city and county.

I congratulate the Minister of State on his work to date. I hope he will continue to challenge the tourism and hospitality sectors. I hope he will also put a light under Fáilte Ireland. People in many markets do not know about certain parts of the country. People in North America, in particular, tend to think about Dublin and Galway, but they forget about Cork. They might be aware of County Kerry as the home of tourism in Ireland, but we need to remember that tourism is not just about Dublin. The Dublin Airport Authority, in particular, must recognise that other airports throughout the country deserve an opportunity to have their business enhanced and increased.

Deputy Brendan Griffin: I thank all of the Senators who have contributed to this discussion which I hope has been as informative for them as it has been for me. All of the contributions have been helpful.

The thing about tourism is that people come up with really good ideas all the time. It is a question of implementing them. Some things are expensive and difficult to implement but others are not. I mention the Wild Atlantic Way as an example. We have always had the Atlantic Ocean and the wilderness. Various ways were there for a long time, but we did not join all of them up until five or six years ago. It did not cost a hell of a lot to develop the Wild Atlantic Way and it is worth looking at the return we have gained from it. Reference has been made to the need to think outside the box. We need to think constantly of new ways and new ideas for what we can do, how we can enhance the overall product, add to what we have and protect the industry.

I thank Senator Ned O'Sullivan for his reference to some very positive initiatives. Senator Anthony Lawlor wondered whether it was a coincidence that we had seen growth for seven years, given that a certain party had been in government for seven years.

Senator Ned O'Sullivan: He would say that, would he not?

Deputy Brendan Griffin: I do not want to get into that discussion.

Acting Chairman (Senator Gerry Horkan): I am glad that the Minister of State does not want to do so.

Deputy Brendan Griffin: When Senator Ned O'Sullivan referred to The Gathering, he might have claimed that Fianna Fáil was responsible for it. I am not sure. I know that it was responsible for the scattering, but I thought the concept of The Gathering was born in Dublin Castle. Regardless of who came up with it, The Gathering was a fantastic initiative at a time when the industry was struggling. We spoke earlier about the need to facilitate a community-driven approach by empowering local communities to take their fate into their own hands and put their best foot forward. Many communities throughout the country, particularly those off the beaten track, embraced the concept of The Gathering. There is scope for a repeat or a follow-up to it. It is a question of when it should happen. As Senator Ned O'Sullivan knows, many communities all over County Kerry, including Listowel in north Kerry, went out of their way to hold special events. It was very positive at a time when morale in the country was at a very low level. It gave people a little hope at a time when there was not much hope around the

place.

I refer to the figures for British tourists for the first four months of the year. The number of visitors from Britain from January to April 2018 represented an increase of 1.1% on the figure for the same period in 2017. That does not sound like a lot, but last year there was an overall reduction of 5% in visitor numbers from Britain. We do not yet have the revenue figures for the period from January to April, but it is interesting that last year visitor numbers from Britain reduced by 5% and there was a reduction of 5.1% in revenue. The two figures were very close to each other. Given that visitor numbers have increased by 1.1%, as I mentioned, we could take it with a giant pinch of salt that the revenue figure will be closely aligned to it. The figure of 1.1% is not final. As the number of visitors increases, we hope the revenue figure will increase similarly. The good news is that in the first four months of the year, there were increases of 12%, 13% and almost 3% in the numbers of visitors from Europe, North America and other parts of the world, respectively. The indications at this early stage are very positive.

Regionality which has also been mentioned is at the heart of nearly everything we are doing. We are trying to ensure as many areas as possible benefit from tourism. We want to spread the benefits to areas which traditionally would not have seen much of them. That is why experiences such as the Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, Ireland's Ancient East and the Causeway Coastal Route in Northern Ireland are so important. The focus is on moving people away from the traditional hot spots into other areas that are visited less. The Causeway Coastal Route is a positive example of this.

I am a bit of an anorak when it comes to hotel prices. I am constantly on websites such as *trivago.com* to see what prices are. Hoteliers in Dublin sometimes get a bad name. There can be times when hotel prices are ridiculously high. I have seen encouraging evidence on many occasions and I encourage anyone to take a random look at hotel prices around the country, not just in Dublin. There is some really good value there also. It is even more important to highlight the good value that is out there and reward those who are putting forward very good value rather than to highlight the very high prices. We could talk ourselves out of the market even though there is very good value out there. I am not suggesting that we bury our heads in the sand, but when there is good value, it must also be highlighted. That is very important.

I have comprehensive information in my briefing notes on the skills issue and I will go through it as quickly as I can. Nearly every Member raised the issue of skills. Addressing projected skills demands requires a combination of measures, including the provision of appropriate direct enterprise support, entry-level training, advanced professional training, increasing the attractiveness of employment opportunities, and improving staff retention in certain occupations. Accordingly, Departments, agencies, education and training providers, industry bodies and employers each have roles to play. The Department of Education and Skills has overall lead responsibility for skills-development policy generally across all sectors, including hospitality and tourism. The Government's tourism policy statement, *People, Place and Policy: Growing Tourism to 2025*, and the *Tourism Action Plan 2016-2018* recognise the key role training and education play in ensuring there is an adequate supply of skilled staff in tourism and in the development of talent accordingly.

The hospitality skills oversight group, under the aegis of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and chaired by the VFI, oversees skills development and promotion in the sector, including monitoring progress and implementing recommendations made in the report on future skills requirements in the hospitality sector in Ireland for 2015 to 2020, which was

published by the expert group on future skills needs, or EGFSN. The expert group advises the Government on skills needs and labour market issues which impact on enterprise and employment growth. The hospitality skills oversight group involves key stakeholders, education and training providers and relevant Departments and agencies, including Fáilte Ireland. The oversight group is prioritising a number of actions arising from the key EGFSN recommendations. For its part, Fáilte Ireland provides complementary tourism-related business development and training supports in line with its responsibility to encourage, promote and support tourism as a leading indigenous component of the Irish economy. In line with the Tourism Action Plan 2016-2018, Fáilte Ireland is committed to working with the tourism industry and the wider education and training sector to implement the recommendations contained in the report on future skills requirements in the hospitality sector. In this regard, Fáilte Ireland participates in the hospitality skills oversight group which oversees skills development and promotion in the sector, including monitoring progress and implementing recommendations. The group's final report will be published shortly.

On chefs and culinary apprenticeships, the Department of Education and Skills has lead responsibility for skills development policy generally across all sectors and oversees the bulk of the required education and training provided nationally through the higher and further education and training bodies, namely, the institutes of technology and the education and training boards. There is a particular issue currently relating to a shortage of chefs. A suite of culinary apprenticeships is being developed and overseen by a collaborative consortium led by the Restaurants Association of Ireland and the Irish Hotels Federation and including education and training providers, Fáilte Ireland and other key industry stakeholders. The first of these apprenticeship programmes covers commis chefs. The commis chef apprenticeship programme secured QQI approval in July 2017 and its initial roll-out commenced in autumn of that year in Galway, Limerick and Clare followed by Kerry in March 2018 and Dublin and Kildare-Wicklow in April 2018, as Senator Lawlor pointed out. Cork, Cavan and Coláiste Íde are scheduled to commence the commis chef apprenticeship programme later this year. There has been an increase in the uptake of the apprenticeship with the most recent courses which commenced in Dublin and Kildare-Wicklow. The consortium will also progress the development of the further stages of culinary apprenticeship, namely, chef de partie, sous chef and executive chef. Good progress has been made on the development of the chef de partie apprenticeship programme with the occupational profile recently being approved by the Apprenticeship Council. It is expected that the programme will be rolled out in a number of institutes of technology in September 2018.

I will leave the briefing note there, but on top of that we have also been engaging with the Department of Business, Innovation and Enterprise and made great progress in February on freeing up the work permit rules to allow chefs from outside the EEA come to Ireland to provide their expertise and skills. We engage constantly with the Department to put in place the most responsive system possible to address skills shortages and to stay on top of our game. The people working in the industry are a crucial component of it. If one does not have skilled people, whether in the kitchen or front-of-house, the overall quality of the product suffers. That is something of which we are acutely aware. I apologise for reading all that but the documentation is detailed and technical in some parts. As such, that was the best way to reflect to the House what exactly is going on.

In response to Senator Pádraig Ó Céidigh's contribution, I agree that Dublin Airport is seeing massive growth. The other airports are also growing, although in some cases their share of the overall Irish market is declining. One can be growing while one's share is falling. What

we have done includes Wonders of the Wild Atlantic Way, a €1.8 million campaign in Britain, including in response to Brexit, which focuses on showing the proximity of airports on the western seaboard to six main urban centres in Britain, namely, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and London. The six airports on the western seaboard are in Cork, Kerry, Shannon, Knock, Donegal and the city of Derry. The campaign is very supportive of those airports. We also have the PSO for Kerry and Donegal which is of critical importance. Capital funding for airports was announced recently and a huge tranche of that is going to the regional airports. It is very encouraging to see the new routes to places outside Dublin. Whereas the Hainan route to Beijing and the Cathay Pacific route to Hong Kong from Dublin are massively important and a huge win for Ireland, other routes are also opening from different parts of the world to different parts of Ireland. I was delighted to be in Cork for the Air France-KLM Paris launch two weeks ago. It is very encouraging. We have seen other routes coming on stream in other parts of the country too. There is new Berlin route from my county. It is critically important that this trend continues for Shannon, Knock and Donegal so that we see growth not only in Dublin.

When the new Government in 2011 put through its mini-budget on jobs, the 9% VAT measure received a great deal of attention. However, the airport tax was also scrapped then. Since then, the lift in and out of the Republic of Ireland has increased by 50%. In Northern Ireland where there is a £26 tax on flights in and out, the lift has increased in the same period by 2%. There is a definite correlation. The airport tax measure was very important to support the industry. I am not playing the blame game here, but as an island nation depending on lift for its tourism industry, a tax on airlines seeking to bring people in and out was ludicrous. While it is a contributing factor in our recent success which has gone under the radar to some extent, scrapping the airport tax was a progressive measure and I note to Senator Ó Donnghaile that it could be replicated in the context of North-South, all-island tourism. It might be very beneficial to Northern Ireland tourism. I note also that the Northern Irish VAT rate is 20% whereas it ours is 9%. Again, that measure has made a huge contribution to our success and it could be looked at in the North also.

I thank Senator Martin Conway for his very complimentary remarks. In this country, one normally only hears remarks like that at one's funeral, if one can hear them then at all. It is lovely to get such compliments. Senator Conway referred to Airbnb and the maintenance of standards. Fáilte Ireland is working closely with suppliers on that matter and developing new standards and regulation for the suppliers of accommodation. The world has changed hugely in the last couple of years having regard to accommodation and how people book it. I am very confident that Fáilte Ireland, as our tourism development authority, is getting on top of that as quickly as possible.

Senator O'Sullivan and I met in Westminster at a CHAMP event at the World Travel Market. We discussed many of these issues then. I know the Senator has a huge interest in the area. I thank Senator Grace O'Sullivan for raising the issue of slow tourism because it ties in with the overall ethos of the greenway strategy and what we are trying to achieve with that. There is a massive future for us in that area. For the people we are trying to bring here for a longer holiday, that is, the culturally curious and those who go off the beaten track, greenways have a massive part to play, which is why I referred to them as "goldways". The development of walking routes also offers big potential.

I was also asked about small communities. While going around the country I found a level of authenticity in small communities that one might not get in other locations. The culturally

curious visitors will find this in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, whose name will appeal to those who seek the authentic experience, with the word "hidden" lending an element of mystique. It has been well developed by Fáilte Ireland to date and I hope it will be a success like the other experiences, as it will benefit many small communities. Empowering local communities to tell their stories is one of the key things and we have to assist them with infrastructural supports to help with the narration of their stories. This is where Fáilte Ireland kicks in with funds.

A buddy system was called for and it may have a role to play so I will raise it with those concerned. On the point about lifeguards I believe that, at a minimum, every local authority should ensure that each blue flag beach has a lifeguard, though it is a matter for them. This week the RNLI has embarked on a new campaign to teach people the basic skill of floating in water. Our water safety agencies do a lot of good work but, unfortunately, last week we saw a huge number of tragedies all around the country in the hot spell. That is concerning and something we want to avoid.

I agree that we can do more as regards the Waterford Greenway. I was in Portlaw with Senator Coffey two weeks ago. Portlaw is only a few short kilometres off the greenway and we need to look at how we can link the greenways, which are expensive, with the little places off them. There does not necessarily have to be a brand new greenway costing €200,000 per kilometre. We can look at local tertiary roads which are rarely used, forest tracks, embankments or flood defences, which we currently see as expenses and a burden on our public finances but which we could look to get a return from by using them for something that contributes to society, industry and the economy.

I will check the diary to see how we are fixed as regards Féile an Phobail. A Kerryman always expects to be busy for the summer until the start of September and we will see how we get on in Páirc Uí Chaoimh in ten days' time.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: I wish the Deputy luck.

Deputy Brendan Griffin: I thank Senator Ó Donnghaile for his compliments on the work Tourism Ireland does. Since becoming Minister of State almost year ago, I have found Tourism Ireland to be one of the most impressive agencies, with Niall Gibbons, Siobhan McManamy and their team doing fantastic work. They are fantastic beacons for the island of Ireland. One of the many positive things to come out of the Good Friday Agreement was the creation of Tourism Ireland. When one travels abroad with them one sees how many contacts they have all over the world and the power they have in selling the island of Ireland. Maria Melia is here from the Department too. She works closely with Tourism Ireland and I am very blessed to have fantastic people in my Department, working both on the international side of things and on the domestic side, the latter with Paul Kelly and his team in Fáilte Ireland. They have a good balance and there is good synergy between both the agencies, which also work with the tourism bodies in Northern Ireland which are doing their best to grow the industry and have seen excellent results in recent years.

On Translink, I will talk to the Minister, Deputy Shane Ross, about the work he has done on public transport in the Department. Anything that assists cross-Border tourism is really important. I was asked about workers and tips and I was very dependent on tips myself for many years, having spent seven years in hotels and three years behind bars. I ran a bar for three years and was quite good at getting tips.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: Was the Minister of State allowed to keep them?

Deputy Brendan Griffin: I was allowed to keep them. When an employer keeps tips meant for front-line staff it is soul-destroying for the workers and it is scandalous, appalling and disgusting. I would hope it is very rare and I am open to proposals to stamp it out. It has not been brought to my attention and in all the places I have worked over the years, I have seen nothing but a very positive treatment of staff in the way of incentives to do more. I am sure there are places where people abuse staff but one's strongest resource is one's people and I would condemn any such behaviour.

Senator McFadden mentioned Athlone. I do not know if it is the centre of the universe but it is a lovely place. The development of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands will be an interesting and exciting development for Athlone and something on which it can capitalise. With the water, blueways have a huge future there as it is the centre of many waterways.

Senator Joe O'Reilly referred to the 9% VAT rate and the price of hotels in Dublin, which I touched on earlier. I would hate to think that the solution to high hotel prices was to revert to the 13.5% VAT rate, which would be an increase of 50%. There is a lack of supply of hotel rooms and I do not see VAT as the solution. We need extra hotel beds and we need to disperse visitors as much as we can, as well as focusing on getting people here all year round rather than all at the same time in July or August. With such measures we can tackle the price issue. It is a good problem to have that we have so many tourists coming here because there were a few years when there was tumbleweed on the streets. The risk of reputational damage from price gouging is enormous, however, and we must be very careful about it.

The Senator also mentioned the issues faced by Border communities in the context of Brexit. We have a very strong Brexit response group that meets on a regular basis, both in London and in Dublin, where it met last Thursday. A number of representatives on the group
9 o'clock are from Border communities, along with people from industry and the agencies both in the UK and here, and they do very good work. He also mentioned vintners and rural pubs, which are an integral part of our overall tourism product and which we need to protect. The Cathaoirleach knows how important a role they play in our economy and in the social lives of many people in the country, as well as in our culture.

I am pleased to say that I have moved to ensure the vintners will be represented on the tourism leadership group, as will the restaurant sector. That is critical because they play such an important role in the overall tourism offering and we need to ensure their representation.

Reference was made to the experiences and the spread. That is critical. One Senator mentioned Ballybay in Monaghan. I always think of Kavanagh. We know that in Northern Ireland Bellaghy has become a great centre because of Seamus Heaney. Great work has been done there. In Sligo we have the Yeats connection and there is great potential for a writers trail in the country. We could bring it right down to Senator Ned O'Sullivan's town of Listowel. Not only John B. Keane but Bryan McMahon and so many other rich literary talents hail from north Kerry. The Seanchaí centre in Listowel is a fantastic centre. Anyone would be proud to bring someone from any part of the world there.

Interestingly, Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland carried out research recently. They asked potential Chinese visitors what they thought of when they came to Ireland. One of the top three responses to emerge from that research was the idea of all our great writers, including James

Seanad Éireann

Joyce. People were interested in coming here to learn more about them and to see the places that inspired them. That is interesting research into what is potentially a massive market for us especially with direct flights.

Senator Lawlor raised the skills issue. He is quite right and I hope I have answered some of his questions.

There is extraordinary potential in sports tourism. We work closely through Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland to promote golf as much as we can and to promote various other activities such as racing. It is great that we will host games for Euro 2020. That will help the overall tourism industry. We did not get the Rugby World Cup in 2023 but I would like to see us bid again at some stage in future. We are well capable of hosting such a major tournament. All these things boost our visitor numbers.

We should not overlook our native games and the impact they can have. It is not limited to bringing people here for the big games. We all know that so many of our diaspora return for the all-Ireland finals in August and September. It is a tourism product. Let us imagine a person is in Cork on 23 June when a great game of football is being played. It is a fantastic event to be able to go to in Páirc Uí Chaoimh, which is now an outstanding facility. These are the types of things we need to do.

My first engagement in Dublin this morning on the way up from Kerry was at the national sports campus, where the bid for the European Cross Country Championships 2020 was being made. The idea is to try to bring the event here. Government policy is very much about trying to bring sporting events to the country and to highlight how open we are to sporting events. The Para Swimming European Championships will come to Dublin in August, which is also very positive.

Reference was made to local suppliers. In recent years, we have seen an improvement in the quality of food on offer. Visitor feedback is generally that the level or quality of food here tends to exceed expectations. It is great to know the story behind the food, for example, that Mary Murphy's duck eggs are from down the road or John O'Mahony's cow is the source of the steak. People love to know that. They love organic and local food and they feel they are part of the community. Senators are spot on in that regard.

Reference was made to the Grand Canal and Royal Canal greenways and blueways. We will publish the greenway strategy shortly, which I hope will inform further progress on these projects of major merit.

Senator Byrne referred to the loops on the Wild Atlantic Way. They are critical and can play a big role in getting people off the beaten track. Earlier, we discussed bringing people into different parts of the country. Fáilte Ireland is working closely with other communities throughout the country to develop visitor experiences. Officials have worked in Connemara and the Dingle Peninsula and they are working on the Skellig Islands at the moment. The Burren is also on the cards and they are working on that front in Donegal as well. It is a case of trying to get communities to come together to demand that their areas are looked at and to push harder to get them covered by the work of Fáilte Ireland.

Heritage sites are of major importance in telling our story. We know that a major reason people come here is to learn about our heritage and hear our story. The Office of Public Works has been a great leader in providing great value for money throughout the country in recent

years. It is a case of trying to be as competitive as we can be no matter who the provider is. We need to try to strike the balance between making a living and ensuring the product is affordable.

A Senator put forward an idea in respect of children. It is important that we do what we can for children. As a father of two young children, I know the days of my wife and I visiting an attraction by ourselves are long gone. It really affects the bottom line now that the family has doubled in number. We see it across the board in everything we do, including accommodation, food and so on, and it is expensive. The more competition we have, the better. I hope I have addressed the skills issue and issues on the regions, which Senators raised.

Senator Buttimmer referred to Páirc Uí Chaoimh. Some €30 million was invested in the stadium project. I was there for the last of Ed Sheeran's three concerts which brought more than 100,000 people came to the city. The development of stadiums can have a major impact on tourism potential. We see many of the headline concerts in Dublin, yet we now have a fantastic facility in Cork that can bring intentionally renowned acts. They can make a major contribution to Cork and the region. People were staying in Killarney for the Ed Sheeran concerts although it is 50 miles away. That was positive. It was an opportunity for Cork for the future.

I was glad to be in Cork for the launch of the new Air France-KLM route. I welcome the route. I announced funding for an Ireland's Ancient East capital grant as well. Cork county and city did well out of that. Senator Buttimmer referred to Cork as a city with a great ambience and character. It is a great place to visit. I seldom get away for a weekend but I managed to get to Cork for a weekend in April. I absolutely love going there. It is a city with extraordinary potential. I admire the humour and wit of the people of Cork. It is a world-class destination as a city break. When the Queen came here in 2011 the first two days were filled with serious and solemn events, yet when she arrived in Cork we could see that even she was soaking up the atmosphere and the great outlook of the people of Cork. It was marvellous to see that and to see the city look so well on that occasion.

Reference was made to the Providence to Cork route. I led a trade delegation to Providence last July to try to give the Norwegian Air route the best possible start. We are disappointed the winter flights have been cancelled but we hope the route can be sustained, as it is important for Cork. Previously, when people left Cork for North America they went on the boat. Those journeys took far longer than the short number of hours it takes Norwegian Air to do the journey. It is a major opportunity for the entire southern region. We have transatlantic flights for the first time between Cork and North America. It is important for the morale of the airport and everyone involved who worked so hard that we hold on to this route. We would love to see it succeed.

Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland are working closely with the Norwegian Air to try to ensure it is a success. Both organisations work closely with all the airlines. That is a feature of modern tourism agencies. The relationship between airlines and the countries in which they operate is mutually beneficial. They do great work for us but we need to support them as well. We should not forget the success we have had in the country as a result of the airlines. Ryanair is given a bad press at times.

Without Ryanair, think of the number of people who would not have come to Ireland over the years. The company deserves recognition, as do all the other airlines which operate here. We need to thank them for choosing to do business with us because we are an island nation. Let us not forget the ferry companies which operate to and from Ireland. We need to work with

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our partners in industry to ensure that they have an incentive to work with us and operate here. The benefits for us are substantial when that happens. I hope I have addressed all of the issues raised.

Acting Chairman (Senator Gerry Horkan): I think the Minister of State has done so.

Deputy Brendan Griffin: I thank Senators for their suggestions and the issues they raised. My door is always open to engage with any Senator on tourism-related matters because the sector benefits everybody.

Acting Chairman (Senator Gerry Horkan): I thank the Minister of State for his comprehensive response to all ten speakers. We do not always have 35-minute ministerial responses.

Deputy Brendan Griffin: My apologies.

Acting Chairman (Senator Gerry Horkan): I am not sure we ever had such a lengthy response from the line Minister. I thank the Minister of State. When is it proposed to sit again?

Senator Maria Byrne: Ar 10.30 maidin amarách.

The Seanad adjourned at 9.10 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Wednesday, 13 June 2018.