

Vol. 309
No. 7



Wednesday,
26 November
2025

DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

SEANAD ÉIREANN

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(OFFICIAL REPORT—Unrevised)

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SEANAD ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 26 Samhain 2025

Wednesday, 26 November 2025

Chuaigh an Cathaoirleach i gceannas ar 10.30 a.m.

Machnamh agus Paidir.

Reflection and Prayer.

Gnó an tSeanaid - Business of Seanad

An Cathaoirleach: I have received notice from the following Senators that they propose to raise the following matters:

Senator Teresa Costello - The need for the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage to make a statement on the mechanisms in place for local authorities and approved housing bodies to deal with recurring breaches of tenancy agreements by tenants.

Senator Lynn Ruane - The need for the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage to review housing legislation to ensure children do not have to attend court proceedings in respect of local authority tenancies in which they are occupiers.

Senator Eileen Lynch - The need for the Minister for Health to provide an update on the inclusion of inflammatory bowel disease, Crohn's disease and colitis in the long-term illness scheme.

Senator Fiona O'Loughlin - The need for the Minister for Health to make a statement on cardiologist waiting times at Naas General Hospital, County Kildare.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove - The need for the Minister for Education and Youth to make a statement on the status of the major building project for Gaelscoil Chnoc na Ré in Sligo.

Senator Cathal Byrne - The need for the Minister for Health to make a statement on the recognition process for internationally qualified dentists to work in Ireland.

Senator Mike Kennelly - The need for the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality to make a statement on the new childminding regulations for home-based childcare providers.

The matters raised by the Senators are suitable for discussion. I have selected Senators Costello, Ruane, Lynch and O'Loughlin and they will be taken now. The other Senators may give notice on another day of the matters they wish to raise.

Nithe i dtosach suíonna - Commencement Matters

Rental Sector

An Cathaoirleach: I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan, to the House. He is most welcome to Seanad Éireann.

Senator Teresa Costello: I thank the Minister of State for being here and taking this matter. This issue concerns the need for the Department of housing to set out what mechanisms are available to local authorities and approved housing bodies, AHBs, when dealing with repeated breaches of tenancy, particularly concerning antisocial behaviour that affects neighbouring tenants. Across the State, but noticeably in areas that I represent, tenants are reporting ongoing issues of antisocial behaviour. These are not isolated instances but repeated patterns that undermine community safety and the right of residents to live in peace. The tools to deal with antisocial behaviour exist in legislation. Under the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014, local authorities and AHBs can issue tenancy warnings, seek possession orders where breaches continue and apply for excluding orders that can remove offenders. While these are significant powers, it is not clear how consistently they are used, how effective they are and what oversight is in place across both local authorities and AHBs.

In my constituency, South Dublin County Council operates a detailed antisocial behaviour strategy. It sets out prevention, mediation and enforcement. The council has systems for complaints, timelines for investigation, multiagency co-operation and the option to apply for excluding orders. Yet, the volume of complaints remains high. In the past three years, South Dublin County Council has received almost 2,000 complaints related to council-owned properties. While some cases progress to warnings and termination, the reality on the ground is that many tenants live beside persistent antisocial behaviour for prolonged periods.

Approved housing bodies now house thousands of families across the country and are subject to the AHB regulatory authority. They also have the power to seek excluding orders and to enforce tenancy conditions. However, there is little transparency around how often these powers are used, how complaints are handled and what level of consistency exists between AHBs. Tenants housed through an AHB should not have weaker protections, nor should AHBs be operating without proper scrutiny when dealing with recurring breaches. Tenants are doing everything right yet are living with the consequences of repeated antisocial behaviour from others. They are reporting it and engaging with the process. What they see in return is a system that is slow, inconsistent and often unclear. For many, the process feels endless while their day-to-day quality of life deteriorates.

I ask the Minister of State to outline the mechanisms that are available to local authorities and AHBs and crucially, how the Department monitors the use of those mechanisms. What guidance or direction is issued to AHBs to ensure that their approaches are aligned with local authorities and the expectations of the Department? It is not enough to have legal powers on paper; we need data. How many tenancy warnings are issued? How many lead to excluding orders? How many lead to full repossession? I call on the Department to commit to publishing annual disaggregated data on antisocial behaviour interventions by local authorities and AHBs, and to review whether the strongest powers like excluding orders are being used to protect

communities. Every tenant deserves to feel safe in their home. The law provides tools to protect them. What we need now is clarity, consistency and oversight so that these tools are used when tenancy breaches become a pattern that harms others.

Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan): I thank the Senator very much for raising this issue. It has been my experience that the vast majority of tenants, such as social housing tenants or tenants of AHBs, are exemplary. They are model tenants. That certainly seems to be the experience. In a small number of situations, there are tenants who may partake in antisocial behaviour. We have to admit that we have scenarios where they make their neighbours' lives hell. It is very difficult. It is apparent that some local authorities are better than others at dealing with that and using the powers that are available.

I will outline the legislation and the tools that are available to local authorities to deal with these situations. My colleague, the Minister for justice, has overall responsibility for policy and legislation relating to serious incidents of antisocial behaviour through the criminal code, which is enforced by An Garda Síochána. My Department also has a key role to play in this by providing a framework of legislation giving social housing landlords a range of tools to tackle antisocial behaviour being perpetrated by their tenants. Local authorities are responsible under the housing Acts for the management and maintenance of their housing stock and the management of their estates, including taking appropriate measures to counter antisocial behaviour. The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1997 provides for the issuing of court orders to exclude a household member engaged in antisocial behaviour from the dwelling and, if appropriate, the estate in question. The Senator has already mentioned this power. The 1997 Act also empowers a housing authority to refuse to allocate or sell a dwelling to a person engaged in antisocial behaviour. The powers of local authorities in this area were significantly enhanced by Part 2 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014, which provides for the issuing of a tenancy warning requiring that tenants cease any antisocial activity. Part 2 of the 2014 Act also gives local authorities the power to recover possession of their dwellings from households in serious breach of their tenancy agreements, including engaging in antisocial behaviour.

In the AHB sector, the Residential Tenancies Acts regulate the relationship between AHB landlords and their social tenants and set out the tenancy rights and obligations for both parties. AHBs are responsible for enforcing the obligations that apply to their tenants under the Residential Tenancies Acts. Where a tenant is engaged in antisocial behaviour or allowing others to engage in such behaviour, the Residential Tenancies Acts allow an AHB to terminate the tenancy, subject to a notice period of seven days in the case of serious antisocial behaviour or 28 days in the case of less serious but persistent behaviour. The Residential Tenancies Act also provides that a third party affected by antisocial behaviour may take a case to the RTB against an AHB which has failed to enforce its tenant's obligation not to engage in antisocial behaviour. The forthcoming residential tenancies (amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2025 will broaden the type of evidence of antisocial behaviour that the RTB can consider in its dispute resolution service.

My answer sets out the tools that are available and the legal status in relation to AHBs and social housing. It is important to say as well that it is not just in social housing situations where we see this type of antisocial behaviour where tenants or residents of a house are causing issues

within estates. It does happen. Thankfully, I still think it is the minority but, obviously, if it is persistent, especially in certain areas like the Senator highlighted in south County Dublin, then it is something we need to address. I have set out the legislation and policy. In fairness, the Senator also asked for the reporting mechanism. I think that is very fair to ask for how we monitor the implementation of these rules. That is absolutely something we will look into.

Senator Teresa Costello: I thank the Minister of State very much for that. I commend South Dublin County Council. I know it is the minority, and it spans far wider than the local authority housing. Obviously, the Department would have the figures for the local authority housing and that is why I framed it in that manner. On antisocial behaviour, one of the most common complaints I hear that really distresses people is the illegal dumping and burning of rubbish within estates. I have had situations in apartment complexes where instead of going to the bins, people are repeatedly throwing rubbish in the corridors. I am dealing with residents and tenants who are absolutely distraught. It is an ongoing issue. I would like to see action on that and an end to it because people are really distressed about this. As we said, it spans beyond the local authority, but I would have thought the Department would have had the figures. That is why the Commencement matter was related to that.

Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan: That is absolutely fair enough. That is a fair ask to be able to provide data. It is about protecting people's and individuals' privacy, etc., but we could provide data so that we can monitor the level, identify the areas where it is more prominent and see what action is being taken to stop it. I know that in some instances there are high levels of intimidation. I imagine it is not easy for council housing staff to get in there and address those issues when there is that level of intimidation that sometimes exists. Maybe they need to be supported and enabled more in addressing it. We all know the situations where the actions of one ruin it for the majority of really peaceful law-abiding citizens, but that is something at which we need to look. The Senator's question specifically in relation to monitoring is very fair, and we will look into that. Then, perhaps we can try to enable local authorities and AHBs to be able to address it and not step back, which is often the case.

Rental Sector

Senator Lynn Ruane: The Minister of State is very welcome. I raise an issue that has come past my desk a couple of times over the last few weeks. There seems to be an increased pressure on families, especially vulnerable families, some of them headed up by women, in relation to rent arrears. In one of two cases of rent arrears, one for €12,000 and another for €10,000, the person has been put out onto the street with their family. They have been in the house over 42 years. A figure of €12,000 is a drop in the ocean compared to the fact that the Dublin Region Homeless Executive stated that it can cost up to €180,000 per year to put a family in emergency accommodation.

However, what has come to my attention in supporting some of those families who are facing court proceedings in relation to rent arrears is that rather than, obviously, wrapping the supports around them, children are receiving court summonses from Dublin City Council and South Dublin County Council in relation to the rent of their parents being behind. Can you imagine being ten years old, some letters come through the door, your name is on that post, and you

pick that up and open it. What it says on that letter, that is effectively penalising, criminalising and shaming the child, is:

Dear ... [so-and-so; I will remove the name],

As an occupant of the property ... [again, I will remove the address], we wish to inform you that there is matter before the courts in relation to the above premises. The matter will be before the court on ... [it gives the date] in District Court No. 23, Four Courts, Inns Quay, Dublin 7. We recommend that you, as the occupant of the property, attend court on this date.

We are literally sending requests for children to come to court. A mother, if she has anybody to seek support from, may say that she is not bringing her child to that. However, if the child opens it, then the child is asking, "Am I in trouble? Am I poor? Can mammy not afford the rent? Are we going to be homeless?" Then the child brings the letter to the mammy, who has probably been trying to shield the child from the struggles they are experiencing within the home in terms of being able to pay the bills, and she is then forced and shamed into having to explain to the child the struggle they are in in terms of rent arrears. What if the mother brings the child to court? Why are we making a spectacle of families in the courts where the children have to sit by and watch?

It makes absolutely no sense as to why we would be effectively creating a potential criminal sanction for child occupiers. They have no responsibility. How can a ten-year-old pay the rent? They are on the rent, of course, because they live there in terms of how many people live in the house, but the only person responsible for making sure that the tenancy is paid and the rent is up to date, or to come up with a new rent agreement, is the leaseholder or parent.

That situation was in relation to a ten-year-old. Another situation was in relation to a 17-year-old. This person turned 18 and the parents were put out on the street. The 18-year-old went to put themselves on the housing list at 18 - they had just left school - and the local authority told them they could not go on the housing list, that they were now barred for two years because they broke their tenancy agreement. This was a child occupier. A child occupier was banned from going on the housing list because their parents could not deal with the cost-of-living crisis they were in being able to keep up with their rent. One of those families had been in the home for 42 years. It makes absolutely zero sense.

I am hoping the Minister of State is going to tell me it is an automation system and that it is not a human making this decision to send a child to court or ask a child to attend court or force a mother to have to explain to that child the difficult situation they are in. What I am hoping is that an automation system has spat these out and sent them to everyone in a house and that we can send some sort of ministerial direction to the local authorities to make sure the message is loud and clear that a child occupier who is under 18 should never receive one of these in the post. No family should be shamed and potentially criminalised for struggling. We want to deal with intergenerational poverty, inequality and all of those things, and this is definitely not the way to do it.

Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan: I thank Senator Ruane for raising this issue. In my view, there are no circumstances in which a ten-year-old child or anyone underage should be getting a court order or formal order to appear in court, especially when it comes to the issue of rent

arrears. I have a formal response which outlines the situations where, potentially, someone who is under the age of 18 may receive a formal letter. Certainly, I do not think there is any justification for the situations the Senator described. Clearly, there needs to be flexibility or, at the very least, a review of the process of where this happens so that we can protect the type of person about whom the Senator is talking.

Obviously, it is my understanding that it would be the clerk of the court who would issue formal invitations to appear-----

Senator Lynn Ruane: The letter was issued on council-headed paper.

Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan: All right. We will go through this, and we can absolutely discuss further how we are going to prevent this from happening in the future.

The general administration of the court system is underpinned by legislation within the responsibilities of my colleague, the Minister for justice. I thank the Senator for clarifying that she is seeking a review of the housing legislation to ensure children do not have to attend court proceedings in respect of local authority tenancies where they are occupiers. Obviously, there is a place for housing legislation within this to try to address it.

Local authorities are responsible under the Housing Acts for the management and maintenance of their housing stock and the management of their estates, including taking appropriate measures to counter antisocial behaviour. The Housing Acts 1995 to 2024 contain a number of provisions whereby a local authority tenant and their household may interact with the District Court. A number of provisions relate to instances whereby the local authority is seeking a possession order to return the property to the local authority in cases of rent arrears, antisocial behaviour or other serious breaches of the tenancy agreement. There was no possession order in the situation the Senator highlighted.

There are also provisions whereby the local authority or, indeed, the tenant themselves are seeking to exclude a person who they believe to be engaging in antisocial behaviour, and in these situations the person in question may be under the age of 18. That does not cover the ten-year-old who received the letter in the case Senator Ruane spoke about.

Section 3 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1997 provides for the issuing of an excluding order through the District Court to exclude a household member, including juveniles, engaged in antisocial behaviour from the relevant dwelling, the vicinity of the dwelling and, if appropriate, the housing estate in question for a period of up to three years. An excluding order may also, if the court thinks fit, prohibit the respondent from causing or attempting to cause any intimidation, coercion, harassment, obstruction of, threat to, or interference with the tenant or other occupant of any house concerned. Breaching these orders, once in place, is an offence, with the person subject to the order liable to penalties, including fines or imprisonment, or in the case of a person under the age of 18, detention in a children detention school.

The Housing Acts allow the local authority or the tenant to apply to the District Court, but they do not prescribe that a child occupying a local authority tenancy is required to attend the subsequent proceedings. It may be that any formal invitation to attend such proceedings comes directly from the courts in order to allow that individual to respond to any allegations made

which may potentially result in the issuing of such an excluding order or, indeed, a possession order.

That response says to me that the situation Senator Ruane described was wrong. It should not have happened. It was rent arrears, which is not covered unless there is a repossession. It did not involve antisocial behaviour, so it is not covered. Senator Ruane also said the letter was issued on Dublin City Council headed paper. According to this answer, the courts are responsible, so there is an anomaly. Something has happened that needs to be looked into further. I could not agree more with the Senator. She presented a situation where a vulnerable young child got a letter in the post. I can imagine the fear and anxiety that would cause. Fair play to her for raising it because it is clearly something we need to look at.

Senator Lynn Ruane: My hope is that it is an anomaly. My thoughts were that it is an automated system that does not pick up the differences, but it is from the law agent in the council. I do not have the other one in front of me that is from South Dublin County Council, where there was a similar situation. The person who was a child occupier was then banned from going on the housing list when they were in school and obviously could not pay rent. It is clear that an anomaly is happening.

I am hopeful this can be addressed simply, without having to look at legislation because it is not part of the legislation. I hope the Minister of State and I can follow up in the next week or two to figure out a simple solution to this. Thankfully, in this situation, the mother got to the letter first, but she was distraught at the thought more letters might come. She was watching for the postman and terrified she would have to tell her child that they were in trouble with rent arrears, with the lack of safety that would have caused for the child and shame for the mother. She is still watching the post because these proceedings will not take place until next year. Therefore, I would love to receive some feedback in the next week or two about how we can address this. There is probably a simple solution.

Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan: Without knowing the exact details of the case, I can say from the way it was presented that if a parent, in this instance a woman, is struggling with rent arrears, it must be dealt with in the most sensitive manner. First, the different scenarios and potential ways in which the rent arrears can be addressed should be worked through. That should be the first port of call. The blunt issuing of a letter addressed to a child, in this instance a ten-year-old, does not make any sense. Like Senator Ruane, I hope this is an anomaly. We will try to find out and get a bit more detail. However, even the response I just gave clearly sets out that rent arrears is not an excuse and does not trigger a letter to a child as happened in this case. That sets it out clearly, but we will certainly get more feedback about whether it is appropriate for the letter to be on local authority headed paper as the Senator said it was. We will try to find out more.

Social Welfare Schemes

Senator Eileen Lynch: I thank the Minister of State for being with us today. I raise this Commencement matter to ask why inflammatory bowel disease, IBD, which includes Crohn's and colitis, which are the two most common forms of IBD, remains excluded from the long-term illness scheme, despite being a lifelong, incurable, medically managed condition that

affects more than 40,000 people in Ireland. According to Crohn's and Colitis Ireland's 2025 report, *Uncovering the Hidden Costs of Crohn's and Colitis*, the financial and personal toll of living with IBD is staggering. The average person spends €3,252 per year out of pocket on IBD-related care, including medication, dietary needs, travel and consultation. A total of 60% of people have experienced financial hardship in the past year due these costs, 47% have avoided seeking medical care and 26% have delayed taking medication to make it last longer, all because of cost. It is incredible to read these statistics that show, in a country as developed as ours, people are avoiding seeking medical care because they cannot afford it.

The burden goes beyond treatment costs. It can affect employment. A total of 82% of working people with IBD report financial hardship due to missed work or lost wages. A total of 58% have had to take five or more days off work each year because of their condition. A total of 67% say their IBD has limited their career or promotion opportunities, and many are forced to attend work when unwell. A total of 86% say they have worked through illness because they could not afford to take time off. These people are contributing to our economy and paying taxes while managing serious illness, often in silence and without support. Yet, when they need the State to step in, they are left behind.

The means-tested system for medical and GP-visit cards is simply not fit for purpose for those suffering with IBD. This is a condition that can flare and recede. Someone may appear well on paper one week but be hospitalised the next. The current assessment methods do not reflect the unpredictable and cynical nature of this illness. People with IBD have contributed to society. They have worked while unwell. They have switched to cheaper, generic medication to save the State money, but when they get sick the support is not available. People living with IBD are not asking for special treatment. They are asking for equal treatment. The reality is that, because their illness is not one of the 16 conditions listed in the long-term illness legislation from 1970, which has not been amended since, they are expected to pay out of pocket, while others, rightly, receive support. That is not equity. It is not fair. It is outdated.

I acknowledge there are other supports, but this is not a standard disease where people are unable to work all the time. We need to acknowledge the crucial difference between it and some of the long-term illnesses which are already acknowledged in legislation. I ask the Minister of State to acknowledge that this exclusion is a policy decision, commit to a formal review of the long-term illness scheme to look at including IBD in it, to include IBD in the chronic disease management programme and to look at reforming the medical and GP-visit card system so that it reflects that disease burden and clinical need are a factor, not just a person's income.

Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan: I welcome the national school from County Cork. It is my county. I welcome them to Seanad Éireann.

I thank Senator Lynch for raising this important issue. In her contribution she covered it all, including that the long-term illness scheme is dated and has not been updated in a long time. In terms of her hope that the condition would be covered, the best opportunity would be a review. I am answering this on behalf of the Minister for Health. However, from listening to what she said, I think that is the way forward. I will outline some of the supports that are available, which the Senator is already well aware of. She knows all this already.

The long-term illness, LTI, scheme was established under section 59 of the Health Act 1970. Regulations were made in 1971, 1973 and 1975. They prescribed 16 conditions to be covered by the scheme, but there have been no additions or deletions to the list since that time. That is a long time and there has been such change to people's health, diets, quality of life and so on. It seems a bit rich and it is high time for a review. That is just me speaking. I will outline the position of the Department of Health. Under the LTI scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness free of charge.

While there are no plans to extend the scope of the scheme, it is important to recognise that the LTI scheme exists within a wider eligibility framework. People who cannot, without undue hardship, arrange for the provision of medical services for themselves and their dependants may be eligible for a medical card. Eligibility for a medical card is determined by the HSE, primarily based on an assessment of means. The HSE may exercise discretion and grant a medical card, even though an applicant exceeds the income guidelines, where he or she faces difficult financial circumstances, such as extra costs arising from illness, so that is a potential avenue. The HSE affords applicants the opportunity to furnish supporting documentation to determine whether undue hardship exists and fully takes account of all relevant circumstances that may benefit them in assessment, including medical evidence of costs and certain expenses.

11 o'clock

The issue of providing a patient with medical card eligibility on the basis of illness or disability was previously examined in 2014 by the HSE expert panel on medical need and medical card eligibility. The group concluded it was not feasible, desirable nor ethically justifiable to list medical conditions in priority order for medical card eligibility. In following the expert group's advice, a person's means remains the main qualifier for a medical card. However, over the past several years, there has been a significant focus on improving access to, and the affordability of, healthcare services. This has been advanced through the substantial policy, legislation and investment to deliver expanded eligibility and services in line with Sláintecare. Major expansions in eligibility include the removal of public inpatient charges in public hospitals, for children in 2022 and for adults in 2023, and the provision of free GP visit cards to include children aged six and seven and those earning no more than the median income. These changes impact up to 500,000 people. The reduction in the drugs payment scheme, DPS, threshold, which caps monthly expenditure for approved prescribed medicines, was reduced to €80 euro per month in March 2022. Other measures have been introduced to try to increase accessibility and affordability.

It comes back to the main point the Senator made. The long-term illness scheme was developed a long time ago. The prescribed illnesses were decided on decades ago. I appreciate that the prepared response states there is no plan to review that. However, in my view, that would be the prudent thing to do. It is all well and good for me to outline the other supports available, but the Senator is talking about a specific condition that seems to me to merit inclusion. That, of course, is up to the Minister for Health.

Acting Chairperson (Senator Shane Curley): Before I allow Senator Lynch back in, I welcome the group from Dromahane National School from County Cork. Senator Lynch tells me the school recently got a new school building. I was a teacher myself in the past. I took up

a job and, six months later, moved from an old school building to a new one. I know the excitement involved in that. Congratulations to you all.

Senator Eileen Lynch: I welcome the group from Dromahane National School today. I am delighted to have them here.

I thank Minister of State for his reply. I acknowledge and completely accept this is not within his Department's remit, so I again thank him for taking this Commencement matter today. He referred to section 59(3) of the Health Act, regarding long-term illness, but what that provision actually states - again, while the Act has been amended, it still refers to the health board - is that the "health board may make arrangements for the supply without charge of drugs, medicine or medical surgical appliances to persons suffering from a prescribed disease or disability of a permanent or long-term nature." That provision does not specify conditions as to the inclusion of other illnesses. It says they may be included. To my mind, there is no legislative barrier to improving, increasing or reviewing the long-term illness scheme. It seems the provision actually allows for further inclusion by use of the word "may". It is simply political will that has prevented this.

I note the other measures outlined in the Minister of State's response in terms of things that are available but, as I outlined in my initial statement, IBD is a disease that can flare up. A patient might be absolutely perfect today and incapacitated tomorrow. He or she may be unable to work for a week. While he or she may be working, potentially earning more than the means-test allowance for the medical card, that does not mean he or she can continue to work. As I said, when we see the statistics from Crohn's & Colitis Ireland, there are so many people suffering from Crohn's or colitis or another form of IBD who are afraid to take time off work and are saving their medication because they cannot afford to buy more. It is not fair to say a person can go for medical card. They can, but these people are working and contributing, and while they may be working today and be in perfectly good health, they could absolutely be incapacitated tomorrow, which could lead to them taking time off work. That difference has to be recognised.

Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan: I thank Senator Lynch. She is right; there is no legislative obstacle to expanding the scope of the long-term illness scheme. There is probably no policy obstacle either. The prepared response says there are no plans to extend it, and I hope that is just for the moment. The Senator is right that with a bit of political will and pushing and presenting the case for inclusion of conditions like IBD in the way the Senator has, which makes sense given how debilitating it is, how costly it can be and the impact it has on people's lives, surely it is time for review. Does that potentially open it up for a whole range of other diseases to be included? I do not know, but it is worth pursuing further. At the moment there are no plans but, as we know, in politics things can change, and if we keep the pressure on, it is worth pursuing.

We have done great things in terms of increasing access to medical cards and GP visit cards. Sláintecare is slowly edging towards achieving a lot of its goals. Expanding the scheme does seem it would be worth pursuing, if nothing else because the range was defined back in the seventies. I appreciate Senator Lynch raising the matter today.

Health Services

Senator Fiona O'Loughlin: The Minister of State, Deputy O'Sullivan, is very welcome to the Seanad. If I had known it was going to be him, I would have a completely different Commencement matter. I appreciate that he is here representing the Minister for Health. It is always important that we have a Minister present. It can be frustrating from our end, and I appreciate it is frustrating for Ministers too when they have to fill in for a different Department. As per the conversation we had the last time the Minister of State was here, I still look forward to welcoming him to the Curragh. We look forward to putting the date in.

The issue I raise is in relation to the problem with getting appropriate time-bound appointments for cardiology in Naas hospital. Naas hospital is excellent. The staff are second to none. I know of so many people who have attended the hospital, both inpatients and outpatients, and they speak very highly of the staff. I want to start with that because, unfortunately, sometimes when we stand up here, we talk about the negative stories, but I know of so many positive situations. Only last night I was speaking to somebody on the phone who had come through Naas for their care and was very happy with it.

What I am about to talk about is not a good news story. A number of people have been in touch in relation to the delays in cardiology appointments, but I was very concerned to hear about one case that came across my desk this week. An 81-year-old lady who had a stroke last year was told by her team that she needed to a cardiology checkup. In July, the request was made. When she contacted Naas hospital last week, she was told it would take another 12 months. For an 81-year-old who is vulnerable and has had health issues to have to wait 18 months for an appointment is simply not good enough. It is not giving appropriate care to the person. In one contact with me over the past few days, her words were that she assumed it did not matter because she was an older woman. That absolutely is not what we want to see within our health service. It is not acceptable. This is not elective care. It is a really important cardiovascular follow-up, and such a delay puts this patient and other patients at real clinical risk. It is very distressing for this lady and her family. It was distressing for me to hear that, and I am sure it is distressing for the Minister of State as well.

We have to ask why cardiology waiting times in Naas are stretching to 18 months. It is simply not acceptable that high-risk patients are left waiting for an appointment that could be critical to their health and, indeed, life-saving. When older patients with a history of TIAs or high blood pressure are placed on waiting lists of this length, it is potentially dangerous. It is not just inconvenient; it really adds to the stress. Timely access to specialist care should be a fundamental part of our health service. It is not something people should have to wait over a year for.

Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan: I thank the Senator. I absolutely promise I will visit the Curragh. There is no doubt about that whatsoever. We will get it into the diary. I am looking forward to it because it is such a gem of a place.

Clearly Senator O'Loughlin is passionate about Naas hospital. She started by saying what a wonderful hospital it is, and I am sure it is a bustling hospital. It has a large population to cater for and we can imagine how important it is. The response I am about to read out will talk about how much we have reduced waiting times but what it probably will not cover is Senator

O'Loughlin's knowledge on the ground of instances where people wait too long. I am not speaking out of turn by saying the Government accepts that, as it stands, waiting lists are too long and too many people are waiting too long on waiting lists. This is something we acknowledge.

The Government is committed to improving access to hospital care and reforming and reducing waiting times for patients through a range of measures, including those to increase capacity such as the establishment of surgical hubs. Since 2021, this commitment has been reflected in a series of multi-annual waiting list action plans aimed at sustainably reducing both the number of people waiting and the length of time that they wait. The ultimate aim is to achieve the maximum wait times as set out in the 2017 Sláintecare report of ten weeks for a first outpatient appointment and 12 weeks for an inpatient or day case procedure. The situations outlined by Senator O'Loughlin are far beyond this. In February of this year, the Minister for Health published the waiting list action plan for 2025, representing this Government's continued commitment to reducing waiting times for patients and improving access to hospital care. With the 2025 plan, the Government is continuing to build upon the progress delivered to date under the multi-annual action plan approach.

In relation to Naas specifically, the most recent National Treatment Purchase Fund waiting list figures are for October and they were published on 14 November. They show that 465 patients are waiting for an outpatient cardiology appointment in Naas hospital. Of these, 406, or 87%, are waiting six months or less and 454, or 98%, are waiting 12 months or less. Twelve patients, just 2% of the total waiting list, are waiting over 12 months. The total number of patients waiting has also shown significant improvement compared to the same period last year and in the year to date. The waiting list has decreased by 55% since October 2024 and by 36% in the year to date.

The number of patients waiting, and the time they are waiting, have also shown substantial improvement since the adoption of the multi-annual waiting list action plan approach in September 2021. Since then, the total waiting list has decreased by 74% and the number waiting over 12 months has decreased by 99%, that is 982 patients. As we progress towards the ultimate Sláintecare targets, the 2025 waiting list action plan has a target of 50% of outpatient appointments to be undertaken within ten weeks. I am very pleased to be able to say that currently Naas is significantly exceeding this target, with 63% of patients waiting no longer than the Sláintecare ten-week target time.

As I said earlier, we all acknowledge that many patients are waiting too long for hospital appointments and treatments. Since 2021, the Government has adopted a multi-annual approach to addressing the problem, and while no patient should have to wait 12 months for an appointment, the figures for Naas show that considerable improvements have been made. It is fair to say improvements have been made, and this is down to pressure from the likes of Senator O'Loughlin, working with the previous Government and the previous Minister for Health, to ensure the waiting list action plans were rolled out. Waiting times have reduced and there are some good figures but Senator O'Loughlin is on the ground meeting people and dealing with constituents who are having a different experience. We can get bogged down in statistics and patting ourselves on the back. There have been improvements but we have to take seriously serious incidents involving older people in particular, as Senator O'Loughlin has highlighted,

because it can be dangerous if they are left waiting too long for an appointment. I appreciate Senator O'Loughlin raising the issue.

Senator Fiona O'Loughlin: I thank the Minister of State. I appreciate that the numbers are moving in the right way. The former Minister, Stephen Donnelly, did exceptional work on this. We had many conversations about Naas hospital. It is still unacceptable that people are waiting more than 12 months. In this case there are 2%, which is 12 patients. This in itself is shocking. Our older people deserve dignity and urgency. They deserve proper access to care. I appreciate the Minister of State taking an interest in this. For me, the lived experience is always the most important experience and the despondent tone of this lady upset me. She felt that nobody cared. I would appreciate if I could give these personal details to the office of the Minister of State so he may bring them back to the Department of Health, which asked him to take this issue, to look into this particular situation, particularly because this lady had a TIA last year and has been waiting seven months to this point. I would appreciate the Minister of State doing this. We need to have better outcomes, particularly for those who are older and vulnerable.

Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan: I thank Senator O'Loughlin. If she passes on the details to my office, I absolutely commit that they will make their way to the Department and the Minister and ensure it is prioritised. Despite all of the great improvements in the reduction of waiting lists, the fact that 12 people have been waiting over 12 months cannot just be a footnote. These are 12 individuals with stories, families and loved ones. We cannot just put it to the bottom of a page as a footnote. It is very important and they are the ones we really need to get to and improve. I thank Senator O'Loughlin for raising the issue. We will get the details to the Department and I hope we will have a good outcome on it.

Acting Chairperson (Senator Shane Curley): I thank the Minister of State for taking all four Commencement matters this morning.

Cuireadh an Seanad ar fionraí ar 11.16 a.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 11.34 a.m.

Sitting suspended at 11.16 a.m. and resumed at 11.34 a.m.

Gnó an tSeanaid - Business of Seanad

An Cathaoirleach: Before the Leader proposes the Order of Business, I welcome the ambassador of Romania to the Distinguished Visitors Gallery along with members of the staff from the embassy here. We are marking Romania's national day. Our Leas-Chathaoirleach is also chair of the friendship group between Ireland and Romania. I welcome them here in advance of their national day. On 1 December 1918, Romania took its first steps towards statehood, had a national assembly in Alba Iulia - I think that is the city - and proclaimed the unification of the people of Romania, a defining moment on Romania's long journey to statehood. It was not easy, having to endure many years of communist oppression, but in December 1989 the courage and sacrifice of the people of Romania was seen live on our television screens in Ireland, returning Romania to the European union of nations and eventually to being a member of the European Union, along with ourselves, and working together on many issues across the world and across Europe.

We established diplomatic relations in 1990 and the latest census states there are 40,000 Romanians in Ireland, but the ambassador tells me there might be quite a few more. As ever, in a global world, people come and go in the European Union and the Romanian language is taught in some of our schools. We acknowledge Ilinca, who is not in the Chamber at the moment, who works in the Seanad office and who has given me some of the pronunciations, which I am not getting 100% right. We thank her for working here, having made the journey from Romania herself. On this, the national day and to mark the friendship between Ireland and Romania we thank the ambassador for taking the time out to mark 1 December. La muli ani, România. I think that is the pronunciation; Ilinca did her best.

Before I ask the Leader to outline the Order of Business, as the Leas-Chathaoirleach is the chair of the friendship group and to mark Romania's national day, I ask her to say a few words.

Senator Maria Byrne: I thank the Cathaoirleach. As convenor of the group, I wish to welcome the ambassador, Georgeta and the team from the embassy and congratulate them on their national day. I know they are having their celebration next Monday and I am looking forward to that. The ambassador and his team have been very proactive in meeting people around Ireland, encouraging people to get involved in politics, not pushing any parties or whatever, but just encouraging people to participate and get involved in Irish life. That is really important. I join with the Cathaoirleach in making this day of celebration.

An tOrd Gnó - Order of Business

Senator Seán Kyne: I join with the Cathaoirleach in welcoming the ambassador and I wish all of the Romanian people here well on their national day.

The Order of Business is No. 1, motion regarding Planning and Development Act 2024 (Modification) Regulations 2025 - referral to committee, to be taken on the conclusion of the Order of Business without debate; No. 2, motion regarding the proposed approval by Seanad Éireann of an extension to the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2021 for a further period of six months, to be taken on the conclusion of No. 1 without debate; No. 3, motion regarding the proposed approval by Seanad Éireann of the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Union support for internal security for the period from 2028 to 2034, No. 4, motion regarding a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Union support for asylum, migration and integration for the period from 2028 to 2034, No. 5, motion regarding a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the justice programme for the period 2028 to 2034 and repealing Regulation (EU) 2021/693, and No. 6, motion regarding a recommendation for a Council decision authorising the opening of negotiations for an agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Korea on the transfer of passenger name record data from the EU to the Republic of Korea for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crime, to be taken at 12.45 p.m. and to conclude at 2.15 p.m., if not previously concluded, with the motions to be discussed together, the time allocated to the opening remarks of the Minister not to exceed ten minutes, group spokespersons not to exceed eight minutes, all other Senators not to exceed five minutes each, time may be shared, and the Minister to be given not less than ten minutes to reply to the

debate; No. 7, Private Members' business, Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2023 – Report and Final Stages, to be taken at 2.30 p.m. and to adjourn at 4.30 p.m., if not previously concluded; No. 8, Irish Film Board (Amendment) Bill 2025 – Committee and Remaining Stages, to be taken at 4.30 p.m.; and No. 59, motion 2 regarding the fishing industry, to be taken on the conclusion of No. 8 and to conclude after two hours, if not previously concluded.

Senator Fiona O'Loughlin: We all know community pharmacies are incredibly important in our communities, villages, towns and cities. Last week, there was a competition to find the best community pharmacy. I am absolutely delighted that Shane Ryan's pharmacy in Rathangan, County Kildare was the national winner. That was of no surprise to me because Shane and his team are absolutely fantastic. The minute you walk in the door, you get an incredible welcome. That welcome, that service and that friendliness means so much to everybody in the area. It is something I witness every time I go to the local shops. As we are approaching Christmas, it is hugely important that we shop Irish and shop local. I had the opportunity over the weekend to do that. I give a big shout out to Cameron and Andrea in The White Stuff. Their service was second to none, which is something I find among the young people working in my county of Kildare and throughout the country.

I also want to mention the Kildare child poverty profile. Kildare was one of four counties selected to do such a profile as part of a pilot scheme. The profile was launched last Friday and there are very important learnings within it. For example, 77,000 people in Kildare - about 31% of our total population - are in economic hardship. When we look at that in the context of other areas, we see that the number in question is bigger than the total population of each of counties Longford, Leitrim, Roscommon, Sligo, Monaghan and Carlow. Surely that should set off alarm bells. Kildare is a county that is perceived to be wealthy and doing well. Therefore, the cost of rent, housing and everything else is as high as it is in Dublin. There are many concerns about children who are neurodivergent. As we know, the services in CHO 7 are not up to the national standard. It is important that we have a debate in this House about the four different areas chosen for the poverty profile. I ask the Leader to seek such a debate.

Women's Aid which has launched a very important new online tool around domestic violence to help to equip the friends and family of those who they may feel are suffering domestic violence and who do not know how to have that conversation with them. While we are in this period of the elimination of violence against women, I thank Women's Aid for what it is doing and highlight it. I encourage those who feel they may have somebody in their circle who is going through domestic violence to equip themselves about how to have those very difficult conversations.

Senator Maria Byrne: I rise today to pass a vote of sympathy to the family of the late Donal Carey, a former Minister of State with responsibility for the arts and the Gaeltacht. He served in that position for two years. He also served as a Senator for a year from 1981 to 1982. He was elected in 1982 to Dáil Éireann, where he served until 2002. He was replaced by his son Joe, who took his place in the Dáil in 2007. Joe was a Member of the Dáil until very recently. Donal was a great character of a man and was very knowledgeable. He was certainly a great support to all, especially to people as they entered politics. He will be remembered by so many. I pass a vote of sympathy to our former colleague Joe and his siblings Leonora and Donal junior. Donal was at home with them all the time and he lived with Leonora. He will be missed

by many people. He was a strong contributor and supporter. He represented the constituency of Clare very well over the years. May he rest in peace.

Senator Aubrey McCarthy: Last Friday, Tiglin, the men's centre in Ashford, had a great event where we marked a milestone which deserves recognition in this House. We celebrated a partnership with South East Technological University, SETU, which was an education project for the past three years that was put together by the former Minister for higher education, Deputy Harris. It was a celebration of lives transformed not only through education but also through education when it is pinned with recovery. Last Friday's event was attended by the Minister, Deputy James Lawless; Dr. Helen Murphy from SETU; and Dr. Victoria Brownlee from the Higher Education Authority. We witnessed many people sharing their stories on how education directly impacted their recovery journey. When education meets recovery and meets people where they are at, it makes a huge difference and gives them tools to build a better future. In just three years, more than 315 people came through the SETU Tiglin programme. For many of them, it was their first qualification ever. Some of them managed to get a master's degree during that time. It shows again that addiction does not define the individual. You can see the potential and it shines through. This initiative is a blueprint to scale for socially impactful education. It shows what lifelong learning can look like when it is in action. It is breaking cycles of disadvantage, marginalisation and vulnerability, and restoring dignity and hope. I give a huge shout-out to the team at Tiglin, to the team at SETU under Professor Veronica Campbell for their vision and commitment, and to the Minister for higher education for being there to support it. I hope he will continue to support it going forward. If we are serious about tackling addiction, homelessness and social exclusion, education has to be at the very heart of our response.

I also want to mention infrastructure. I know it has been raised before, but I must mention the queues faced by thousands of people as they commute to Dublin on the N7, which I travel on. It is also happening around Galway. The N7 is a vital artery connecting Dublin with the midlands and the south, but it has become a bottleneck of absolute frustration. Many people are spending more time in their cars on the N7 than at the dinner table with their families. It is not just an inconvenience; it is a matter of national competitiveness and quality of life. We need urgent investment in road upgrades, we need intelligent traffic management and we need to expand public transport. The N7 cannot remain the bottleneck that it is. It has to be restored as a functional route. We have made inroads into road infrastructure but the population is increasing so there is a need to do much more.

Senator Chris Andrews: Last week, the Minister for agriculture published the results of the consultation on surgical artificial insemination. This is, as was highlighted, a barbaric practice of which most people are unaware. It is an absolutely sickening practice. The consultation opened on 18 June 2024 and closed at the end of July of that year. There were 606 submissions, with 99% of all submissions being against surgical artificial insemination. I reiterate that 99% of all submissions wanted to ban this practice, with just two people saying it is okay. Even though the Minister has known about the results of the consultation - 99% of submissions want to ban it - for 14 months, he has sat on his hands and allowed the practice of surgical artificial insemination to continue. This is really hard for me to understand. The Government talks about the welfare of greyhounds, but there is zero evidence that it cares about greyhounds, or dogs in general for that matter. I would like to know when the ban is going to be introduced.

There is clearly next to zero support among the Irish public. You have to ask yourself why the Minister will not ban this practice now. It is clear that the only requirement demanded of the greyhound industry is that the €20 million in funding it receives every year is spent. There is no accountability or expectation of value for money. This is obvious when comparing what is achieved by Irish local rescues versus the industry rehoming costs. The industry's much-lauded traceability system is a sham. Unless every single greyhound residing in a registered greyhound premises is included in the traceability system, it is not fit for purpose. We have seen where Irish-born greyhounds brought back to Ireland for breeding are not captured in the system, yet the pups they produce are. Imagine if the bovine traceability system were this ineffectual. It would never be tolerated. Yet when it comes to greyhounds, we turn a blind eye.

The Minister is saying the findings will be part of a legislative process. This will mean more delays, and possibly years of delays, before this barbaric practice would be banned. It cannot be allowed to happen. In 2024, 5% of all greyhounds died on the track or shortly afterwards. That is a shameful stain on the Government's policy in terms of dog and animal welfare policy. In 2024, 6,000 Irish greyhounds were exported to England to keep the gambling industry going there and to keep it alive. Let us not pretend that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael care about dog welfare. All the evidence shows they do not care about dog and greyhound welfare.

Senator Alison Comyn: I raise the urgent situation at Marymount National School in Drogheda in County Louth. It was built in 1969, more than half a century ago, and is now not fit for purpose. The building is in a really shocking state. A teacher sent me photographs yesterday. The classrooms are so cold and damp that condensation runs down the windows, gathering on sills and the floors. Children are actually getting wet at their desks and wearing coats indoors just to learn. The school is also terribly overcrowded. It has a higher incidence than usual of children with special needs.

For years, the school has been promised a new building. In July 2022, the Department confirmed a project for 24 classrooms and ancillary accommodation. In October 2024, it was listed among active projects under the capital programme. In April this year, the Minister's own reply stated that the project was at an advanced stage, at the tender stage, and would come in under Project Ireland 2040. Yet, nothing appears to have changed on the ground. Staff and parents are asking when construction will actually begin and when the children will actually move into a warm, safe, habitable and modern building. These conditions are unacceptable in 2025.

I ask today for a clear and urgent update from the new Minister for education. I would like to know if the project has gone to tender and, if so, when the work will commence and what is the expected completion date. This has gone on for a long time. The community, the students and the staff, in particular, are suffering. They have waited long enough. They deserve certainty and definitely delivery as soon as possible.

Senator Linda Nelson Murray: In my constituency, there is a lovely little village called Rathmolyon. It has a population of about 1,700 people. Five years ago, a brand-new housing development of 16 houses, called the Ringfort Estate, was begun. I will read some words taken directly from one of the couples looking for their forever home there:

It has been more than five years since we put our booking deposit down on a home in the Ringfort development in Rathmolyon. At the time, it felt like the start of a new chapter and a chance to put down roots in our own community, raise our children and finally have a place to call our own. Instead, we have spent the better part of six years trapped in limbo, paying rent, storing furniture and living with a constant sense of uncertainty and frustration. We were never warned that the project would be in jeopardy. We believed, as any buyer would, that the developer was doing everything in his power to deliver our homes. We paid our full deposit, signed our contracts and were told to expect completion within 18 months, but that never happened. In early 2023, we were told that each buyer would need to pay a lot more to make the project viable. Within five months, receivers were appointed. We, along with four other remaining buyers, tried to stay positive. We negotiated, waited and compromised, even agreeing to pay an additional sum each to help move things along. By late 2024, every house on the site was structurally complete. The utilities were connected and all that remained was the final road surfacing and landscaping works. We have been left to fight for something that should have been straightforward. Our contracts are binding, our payments are made and the homes are built. The financial and emotional toll has been immense.

This is not just a story about one development. It is a reflection of how broken a system can be that allows ordinary people to put their deposit down on a home, contractually agree the price of their home, do everything right and still lose. What protections are currently available to home buyers in insolvency situations, such as the five contracted purchasers in the Ringfort development in Rathmolyon who have been waiting five years for completion despite having valid contracts for sale? This situation is absolutely desperate. Can you imagine forking out all that money, knowing your house is standing there and you cannot get your keys? Will the Leader ask the Minister for housing and the Minister for enterprise to look at this project to identify a way these people can get their homes and to protect other people who may be about to pay their deposits today on homes from going through a situation like this?

Senator Sharon Keogan: I attended that launch last week in Tiglin with Senator McCarthy. I was blown away with the work that is actually done in Tiglin, not just in that area but throughout this country. We are in the Ha'penny Bridge, so to speak, in relation to the work Senator McCarthy does daily with people who are on the margins in this country. I commend him on the work he does every single day.

I wish to address the motion that will be before us to extend Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2021 yet again. This Act was brought in during Covid as an emergency measure to allow outdoor seating for a licensed premises. Five years later, we are still leaning on emergency legislation and this recurring debate is beginning to feel like Groundhog Day. This is not good governance. The Government has once more abandoned legislation for outdoor dining. This is the third time we have been here. We were first promised the sale of alcohol Bill, a major reform that never materialised. The intoxicating liquor Bill 2024 was then announced with great fanfare and was quietly dropped. Now, we are told the criminal law and civil law (miscellaneous provisions) Bill 2025 will finally put these measures on a permanent footing. The Cabinet approved this in May, yet here we are, kicking the can down the road for another six months.

Let us not forget that back in 2021, the Government pumped millions into outdoor dining infrastructure through the outdoor dining enhancement scheme. Businesses received grants of up to €4,000, and €9 million was spent on permanent weatherproof structures in towns and cities. Five years later, after all that investment, we are still relying on emergency legislation instead of giving businesses the certainty they deserve. For the record, I fully support our hospitality sector and the right to provide outdoor dining and drinking. This is why I will not oppose the extension today. I will not punish businesses for the Government's failure to legislate properly. Let me be clear, though. This is a reluctant agreement and it comes with a demand for action. I do not want this Groundhog Day to keep repeating. I believe I speak for everyone when I say the next time I want to be debating this issue as permanent legislation and not an eternally repeating extension.

Senator Paul Daly: I highlight the issue we are being bombarded with at the moment on every media outlet, including on television and radio, the fact that we have Black Friday on Friday, and the devastating effect this is having on our local rural communities and our local rural retail outlets. Some of the statistics on online shopping are startling and actually frightening. It has been proven that 85% of Internet users do shop online and 40% of those purchases are made outside the EU. A really startling figure is that over €12 million of low level parcels are entering the EU from China every day.

Like many people here, I had my local GAA club AGM on Sunday night. We received our financial report and a list of all the sponsors and supports we had within our local community. Not one Chinese company was listed on it. It is the poor local retailers and traders, and sole traders, who are trying to survive, who are putting their hands in their pockets to support not only the GAA but every other worthy cause within the community.

As I said, we are being bombarded at the moment with advertising. There are plenty of Irish retailers, outlets and suppliers who will sell to people online. We need to support them. The Government needs to counteract the Black Friday campaigns with a shop local and support Ireland campaign at this time of the year. A lot of people will do their Christmas shopping on Friday online and purchase goods from places as far afield as China. This will continue until we put up a stand. It is affecting rural Ireland in particular, but also urban Ireland. The urban outlets and high streets are really suffering the consequences. People need to be aware that some of these outlets are now using Ireland in their advertising to give the impression they are Irish outlets, when they are far from that. The Government needs to lead a strong campaign on this issue. We need to collectively support our own.

Senator Manus Boyle: I ask that the Minister of State with responsibility for the Office of Public Works, OPW, give an update on Bridge Street in Killybegs in County Donegal.

12 o'clock

The street was flooded in November 2024 and the devastating scenes were seen worldwide. People on Bridge Street lost everything that day. Businesses closed and never reopened. We are coming up to the one-year anniversary. Over the weekend, with the heavy rain warning and heavy rain in Donegal, residents rang me about what has happened. They say very little has been done. They do not see any emergency measures being taken. They feel left behind and neglected. I ask for an update from the Minister on what is happening with Bridge Street,

what has been done and what will be done in the future so these people can go to bed at night and be reassured the river is not going to come into their houses once more. This was the second time it happened. It can never happen again.

Senator Mike Kennelly: First, I object to Senator Andrews's statement on dog welfare, insulting dog breeders and the people involved in the greyhound industry in this country. It is the most regulated industry in Ireland. The greyhound owners and everyone involved in the industry love their pets more than anything else.

Senator Paul Daly: Hear, hear.

Senator Mike Kennelly: This was debated last week and Senator Andrews still comes in this afternoon and hurls a lot of stuff at the greyhound industry. I want that to be put to bed.

Today we are on about rural activity and I wish to speak about investment in rural transport, in particular Local Link and demand-responsive transport services in Kerry. These services are lifelines for people across rural Ireland, including rural Kerry, where I come from, including the older person needing to reach his or her GP, the student getting to college and the worker who depends on a reliable bus to get to his or her job. They connect people to opportunity, community and essential services but in too many cases there simply is not enough coverage. Some communities see one bus per day; others see none at all. Families in these areas are forced to run a second car, not out of choice but out of necessity. Effectively, they are punished for living in a rural area. This is not fair or sustainable.

I will mention one area in north Kerry. Abbeydorney has an active retirement group, which meets every week. Unfortunately, the Local Link service cannot run the service every week; it runs it twice per month. That is letting down a community that would attend this hub every week but the funding seems not to be there. I call on the Minister to come to the Seanad and debate this and to secure funding that ensures everyone in rural Ireland can get on this transport system.

Senator Sarah O'Reilly: I will follow on from something Senator Kennelly touched on. I read in my local paper, *The Anglo-Celt*, a story about a man fined for giving people lifts home in a rural part of County Monaghan. He was brought to court for it. Two undercover guards took a lift with him. Is this really the biggest issue facing us? The real crime is the desolation of our rural areas. Two pubs are closing for good each week in this country. In many parishes, particularly the very rural parish I come from in County Cavan, the social life is the local pub and the social scene is a huge part of the community. Those pubs are closing because of the lack of availability of transport for people, particularly older people who would like to take a drink but cannot drive.

As a result of that, I tried to help a man interested in taking part in the local area hackney pilot scheme. The scheme is strangled by restrictions. There was huge difficulty in qualifying, the operational zone was tiny and there was limited financial support. In the end, we did not meet the criteria so could not apply. I have looked into that scheme since and found that only two people were successful. If the Government is really interested in supporting rural communities with schemes, it should make them accessible and not overly bureaucratic. The

scheme is being reviewed and we are still waiting for the review. I ask the Minister to review the scheme and come in here for statements on it.

Senator Cathal Byrne: I am proud to be from County Wexford. We have 260 km of golden coasts but, unfortunately, in an era of climate change that is bringing difficulties for residents living along the coast. Some 211 km of that 260 km are at risk of coastal erosion. Last Friday with local councillor Frank Staples, I visited Ballyhealy, an area now suffering from at least 1 m per year disappearing into the sea. In recent storms that has been exacerbated and up to 5 m of Wexford coastline has disappeared into the sea. Within 200 m of our coast, there are 4,355 properties. All of these are at risk of disappearing into the sea in the next ten to 15 years. Unless there is direct action in places like Ballyhealy, the result will be the loss of businesses, agricultural land and residents. The residents in the area are terrified their homes will disappear into the sea. I call for an urgent debate on our national coastal erosion strategy with the Minister and for proper resources to be put in place. Up the road from this location, there was successful rock armour protection in Seaview, Kilmore, but the problem has worsened further upstream where it is not protected. We need to get to grips with this issue before it is too late.

Senator Dee Ryan: I wish to highlight a wonderful venture launched yesterday, namely the collaboration of the Shannon Foynes Port Company with Associated British Ports and BrestPort. Associated British Ports runs the ports across the UK and BrestPort handles the ports across France. They have combined to establish an alliance of ports to handle floating offshore wind. It is hoped the alliance will be able to share best practice and experience and promote learning and the rapid adoption of floating offshore wind across Europe and the world.

Shannon Foynes Port Company CEO Pat Keating has been one of the strongest and earliest advocates for floating offshore wind on the west coast. Since I first met him in 2018, he has been highlighting and trying to draw Government attention to the many natural resources on our west coast, including the deep channel in the Shannon Estuary, the existing port that has the potential to be expanded, the connectivity through Moneypoint and Tarbert into the grid and the high winds on our Atlantic west coast, which others around the world would compare to oil fields. They say Ireland is the Saudi Arabia of wind. I commend Pat Keating, the Shannon Foynes Port Company and the other port companies that have joined forces and announced this collaboration, which we hope will help expedite the adoption of floating offshore wind across Europe.

Senator Martin Conway: I express my sympathy and condolences to the Carey family on the passing of former Minister, Deputy and Senator, Donal Carey. Donal served the people of Clare with distinction. He was a Member of the Houses of the Oireachtas for a long time and a Minister in rural development. I would say he was the first Minister for rural development. That was back in the rainbow coalition Government between December 1994 and 1997, when a lot of significant work was done to prepare rural Ireland for what we experience today. Donal was a great man and an assiduous constituency worker. A lot of people in Clare benefited from his service over the years. It is a very sad day for County Clare. I offer my condolences to our former colleague Joe Carey, his sister Leonora and his brother Donal Óg on the passing of their father. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.

An Cathaoirleach: We join with the Senator in expressing our sympathies to the family and friends of the former Minister of State and Deputy.

Senator Robbie Gallagher: I was very disappointed to learn that the talks aimed at finding a resolution to the dispute over pensions for school secretaries and caretakers have broken down. As we all know in this House, school secretaries and caretakers are a vital component of our school system without whom it simply would not function. It is disappointing that school secretaries and caretakers had to go on strike initially. We all met them on the picket line. It is disappointing that it appears that those talks appear to have now come to the end of the road for now. I appeal to the Minister for education to re-engage with our school secretaries and caretakers because the last thing they want to do is to be back on the picket line come January, and the last thing we want is for them to have to do that. All disputes come to an end eventually. We seem to have been talking about school secretaries and caretakers for an awfully long time. They have genuine and legitimate aims and aspirations that every effort should be made to meet. I ask that the Minister re-engage with the school secretaries and caretakers to try to find a resolution to this problem.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: Last week, I spoke about companies that are holding up to 200 taxi plates and renting them out at a cost of between €100 and €200 per week. There will be a major taxi drivers' strike in Dublin tomorrow. It will finish out on Merrion Square. Why? We have all become familiar with the various companies we can use to get a taxi. One of those companies has introduced a new way of dealing with drivers. A case in point was given to me today. The company in question quoted €66 for a taxi trip from Cabinteely in Dublin to Dublin Airport, which is about right. It then put out a message to taxi drivers that it was prepared to offer a driver €30 to do the trip. They are ripping off taxi drivers.

We brought in deregulation to encourage competition and now competition is being undermined in two areas, one of which is single owners owning multiple plates and renting them out. The second is the introduction of a new system on the part of one of these call companies. I understand that the system these companies are using in the UK is such that when you ring for a taxi, you get a quote for, say, £25. The company then puts out a message to drivers saying there is a trip from A to B and offers £10, and if there are no takers, it might increase it to £10.50. Eventually, the company gets a taxi driver who will go for maybe £12 and pockets the rest. I hope that is not going to be allowed in this country. Taxis are expensive. We have all used them and we use them all the time because we have to. To think the fee is not going into the hands of the family man or woman driving the car is, for me that is anti-competitive. I will be writing to the competition authority today to see if it is prepared to look into it. We should have a debate in this Chamber on the whole issue of transport.

An Cathaoirleach: Before I call the Leader to respond to the Order of Business, I welcome the guests of the Minister of State, Deputy Michael Healy-Rae, to the Gallery. I believe there are guests from the United States here as well.

Senator Seán Kyne: I thank all Senators for their contributions. Senator O'Loughlin raised the issue of community pharmacies and the importance of shopping locally. Senator Pal Daly also raised this matter in relation to Black Friday. The concerns are that foreign multinationals

are availing of supports from Irish consumers when there are local businesses that need to be supported. I fully agree in relation to the proper marketing and adjudication of Irish businesses in that regard. As Senator Daly said, local businesses support their local GAA clubs and different clubs and should be supported as well.

Senator O'Loughlin also raised issues in relation to Kildare's child poverty profile. I will request a debate with the Minister, Deputy Foley, in that regard. The Senator also commended the work of Women's Aid and its new online tool in relation to domestic violence.

Senators Maria Byrne and Martin Conway raised the passing of Donal Carey. May he rest in peace. Our sympathies go to Joe, Leonara and Donal Jnr. As has been said, Donal was a consummate constituency politician, a former Minister of State, a TD and a Senator. He was involved in programmes relating to rural Ireland back when he was a Minister of State during the rainbow coalition. Our thoughts go to his family and friends in County Clare and across the country.

Senator McCarthy raised the great work of Tiglin and the South East Technological University in supporting those with addiction and those who fall into homelessness in terms of education and how that can transform lives. I agree with that. The Senator also raised issues relating to road infrastructure and the queues that are being faced on the routes to Dublin. The population is growing, as are the number of cars on the road. We need continued investment in road infrastructure and also in public transport to enhance rail and bus services, whether they are BusConnects services or bus lanes across the country to support commuters on the way to Dublin.

Senator Andrews raised the issue of surgical AI. As Senator Kennelly pointed out, there was a debate last Thursday. Senator Andrews said the Minister sat on his hands for 14 months. The Minister, Deputy Heydon, took over in January or February and has not had that long in the role. However, he said that he has told his officials that he wants this report to be published as soon as possible and indicated it will happen this year. He gave that commitment here in person last week when we had a debate on the greyhound fund and I take his word on that.

Senator Comyn raised the needs of Marymount National School in Drogheda and her concerns about the safety of children. She also asked for an update. I suggest that she put down a Commencement debate on this matter. I know the capital plan for the next five years has been agreed within education. I understand a list of schools will be published in relation to that. I hope that Marymount is on that, but if the Senator puts down a Commencement debate on the matter, she might get a more up-to-date answer.

Senator Nelson Murray raised Rathmoylon. I lived near there once upon a time, out the Longwood Road. I used to pronounce it differently but I was corrected in that regard, in line with how the Senator said it. She talked about Ringfort development and raised concerns about first-time buyers being asked for additional money. Again, I am not sure where I can go with that, but I will certainly raise it with the Minister of State, Deputy Cummins. Perhaps the Senator can put down a Commencement matter on that and on the wider issue of people being impacted in relation to additional money being sought for developments. It is something that could raise its head in other parts of the country as well.

Senator Keogan raised the extension of the outdoor seating regulations. While I accept her point, I do not know the exact medium-term plans on that, but I will raise it with the Minister.

I know that this goes to committee and comes back. I am sure it has been discussed at committee, but I will find out and see what the long-term plan is on that.

Senator Boyle raised the issue of flooding in Bridge Street in Killybegs. I ask him to put down a Commencement matter on this matter. I know work was done at the time on supports for businesses, but I remember from the pictures that it was quite a severe flood at the time, nearly a year ago. The Senator might put down a Commencement matter with the Minister of State, Deputy Moran.

Senator Kennelly called for investment in rural transport. He mentioned the case of Abbeydorney. He made a valid point. I will raise the matter with the Minister of State, Deputy Buttimer, and ask him to come in to talk about LocalLink and rural roads as well. The Senator may want to put down a Commencement matter on the specific case, but I will engage the Minister of State on the matter.

Senator Sarah O'Reilly raised issues regarding rural Ireland, the importance of pubs and making local schemes accessible. I agree. I will investigate the matters she has raised and see what plans there might be for those schemes.

Senator Cathal Byrne raised Wexford, the disappearance of the coastline and the possible impact for landowners in the first instance but also homeowners who may see their properties under threat. I will ask for a debate with the Minister of State, Deputy Moran. On the specific case of Wexford, the Senator might put down a Commencement debate.

Senator Dee Ryan raised an agreement between Shannon Foynes Port, ports in the UK and BrestPort in France in relation to floating offshore wind and suggested sharing experiences. That would certainly seem to be of benefit. In regard to proposals there, I know there has been some work on floating wind turbines and I can see that would be of benefit to those areas where there are objections to that whole idea.

Senator Gallagher raised the issue of pensions for school secretaries and caretakers, who went on strike, and the collapse in the talks. I am sure the Minister for education, Deputy Hildegard Naughton, will be re-engaging with those. I will certainly seek an update on that matter for the Senator.

Senator Craughwell raised worrying issues regarding the taxi sector and concerns about people being charged €30 while taxi operators are being offered much less by the industry or by owners. That is a worrying issue with regard to taxi pricing because the consumer, at the end of the day, pays a significant amount of money for taxi journeys. You would like to think that money is going to those who drive the taxis and their families. I will certainly request a debate on matters relating to the taxi industry.

An Cathaoirleach: I welcome Deputy Noel McCarthy to the Gallery. I thank him for coming with his guest to Seanad Éireann today.

Order of Business agreed to.

Planning and Development Act 2024 (Modification) Regulations 2025: Referral to Joint Committee

Senator Seán Kyne: I move:

That the proposal that Seanad Éireann approves the following Regulations in draft:

Planning and Development Act 2024 (Modification) Regulations 2025,

a copy of which was laid in draft form before Seanad Éireann on 18th November, 2025, be referred to the Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage, in accordance with Standing Order 79(2)(b), which, not later than 2nd December, 2025, shall send a message to the Seanad in the manner prescribed in Standing Order 84, and Standing Order 86(2) shall accordingly apply.

Question put and agreed to.

Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2021: Motion

Senator Seán Kyne: I move:

That Seanad Éireann resolves that the period of operation of sections 1 to 7 and 9 of the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2021 (No. 14 of 2021) be extended for a further period of 6 months, beginning on the 1st day of December, 2025 and ending on the 31st day of May, 2026.

Question put and agreed to.

Cuireadh an Seanad ar fionraí ar 12.23 p.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 12.48 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 12.23 p.m. and resumed at 12.48 p.m.

EU Regulations: Motions

Acting Chairperson (Senator Pat Casey): I welcome to the House a group from Carrigallen, who are guests of Deputy Eamon Scanlon. They are very welcome. I hope the Deputy looks after them for the rest of the day. I ask them to be sure to get a good drink out of him before they leave.

I welcome the Minister for Justice. The debate is now going to start in respect of proposed approval of a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing Union support for internal security for the period from 2028 to 2034.

There is another motion regarding the proposed approval of a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing Union support for asylum, migration and integration for the period from 2028 to 2034.

There is also a motion regarding the proposed approval of a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the justice programme for the period 2028 to 2034 and repealing regulation EU 2021/693.

There is also a motion regarding the proposed approval of the recommendation for the Council's decision authorising the opening of negotiations for an agreement between the

European Union and the Republic of Korea on the transfer of passenger name record data. All four motions will be debated together and decided on separately.

Senator Seán Kyne: I move:

That Seanad Éireann approves the exercise by the State of the option or discretion under Protocol No. 21 on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the area of freedom, security and justice annexed to the Treaty on European Union and to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, to take part in the adoption and application of the following proposed measure:

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Union support for internal security for the period from 2028 to 2034,

a copy of which was laid before Seanad Éireann on 14th August, 2025.

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O'Callaghan): Like the Acting Chairman, I want to welcome the guests in the Gallery. I have to say that when I walked in, I thought I was appearing before a grand jury. I welcome them all. I wish them a successful day with Deputy Scanlon.

I thank the Acting Chairman and his colleagues for facilitating these motions. This morning, the Government approved my request to seek the approval of this House to opt in to these EU Commission proposals. These proposals form part of the multi-annual financial framework, sometimes referred to as the MFF, package. As the House will know, the MFF is the European Union's long-term budget plan that sets the annual spending limits for various policy areas over a seven-year period.

The proposals today relate to the asylum, migration and integration fund, the internal security fund and the justice programme fund. Ireland already participates in and draws down a lot of funding from these streams. The proposed regulations will cover the period 2028 to 2034. As instruments with a Title V legal base, Protocol 21 of the treaty applies and an opt-in under Article 3 is required in order for Ireland to continue utilising funding made available under the programmes.

On the proposals themselves, the proposed regulation for a new asylum fund provides for a total considerable amount of money in EU funding, which is significantly increased from what the fund was before. Funding can be drawn down to support member states' capacity to manage and respond to asylum, migration and integration challenges and will be available to support member states' implementation of the pact. In fact, the total amount that will be in the fund from the years 2028 to 2034 will be €11.9 billion, which is an increase on the €6.2 billion that was in the previous version of the fund. Ireland received €63.53 million from that fund during its last iteration. Ireland has participated in the previous two iterations of the fund and participated in the two comparable funds that preceded it, the European integration fund and the refugee fund. Under the current programme, the fund provides a range of supports for international protection applicants, beneficiaries of temporary protection and other third country nationals arriving in Ireland. This funding assistance also supports the State's ability to fund a wide range of NGO-led migrant integration programmes and covers certain aspects

of the Irish refugee protection programme and the returns programme, both of which are managed by my Department.

Ireland has also benefited from participation in previous iterations of the EU internal security fund, ISF. The proposed regulation will establish a new internal security fund for 2028 to 2034 and provide an indicative amount of €6.8 billion, a significant increase on the €1.9 billion provided under the current internal security fund, which operates from 2021 to 2027. Internal security is high on the Union's agenda. In recent years, geopolitical instability has impacted greatly on the EU. The threat picture facing the EU is stark. Security threats are increasingly cross-border in nature, necessitating closer co-operation between member states. We also know that serious and organised crime, terrorism, radicalisation and violent extremism need to be combated at a Union level. As we know only too well, Ireland is not immune to this. The indicative increase for this fund reflects the priority afforded to protecting the Union's internal security and the need to keep it high on the agenda. The EU internal security fund is informed by ProtectEU, which is the Commission's new internal security strategy. I had the pleasure earlier this week of meeting the Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration, Magnus Brunner, when he visited Ireland. I know that the ProtectEU policy is a central theme of his Commissionership. The aims of ProtectEU can be achieved by enhancing operational law enforcement co-operation and the exchange of information between member states and relevant EU agencies.

Under this fund, grants may be drawn down for activities that include the development of national and EU-wide information systems, joint operations between cross-border and national authorities and training on new technologies and processes. Beneficiaries of the programmes implemented under the ISF may include national police, customs and other specialised law enforcement services, NGOs and local public bodies. Under the current internal security fund, Ireland has benefited from funding provided that has enabled investments in IT systems, including Ireland's connection to the Schengen information system, the establishment of Ireland's passenger information unit and the enhancement of the automatic number plate reading system in Garda vehicles. From the previous internal security fund, we got €21.8 million. Again, these are funds where there is a clear financial benefit as well as a substantive benefit to Ireland opting in.

The third motion listed for this debate is on the proposal to establish the justice programme fund. This proposal is also a continuation of previous iterations of the programme and intends to establish a fund of €798 million in total over seven years. Member states can draw down from the fund for projects that promote adherence to the rule of law and fundamental rights, support and improve access to justice and support judicial training and the proper funding of independent judicial systems. Some examples of Irish projects funded under this stream include a research project by the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, ICCL, to raise awareness of the application of the standards of the European Court of Human Rights, ECHR, in day-to-day decision-making on flight risk as the ground for pretrial detention, a Law Society project to increase knowledge in key areas of EU law for EU lawyers who would be able to give better advice to European citizens and businesses, and a Tusla-led project to improve access to child-friendly justice. We really need entities to be aware that this fund is available and that they can make applications to it if they come within the justice portfolio. The European Judicial Training Network, of which the Judicial Council of Ireland is a member, is also funded under the justice programme. This network brings together judicial training institutions from around

Europe to develop and implement training for the judiciary. It is important that Ireland continue to support the work of this independent training institute.

In respect of all those three opt-ins I am proposing, I want the House to know that from a procedural point of view, opting in to these measures at an early stage will allow Ireland to maximise our influence on the final shape of these proposals. This is why I am proposing an opt-in under Article 3.

I will now deal with the separate motion regarding participation in the passenger name record, PNR, data agreements between the European Union and the Republic of Korea, for which I am seeking the approval of Seanad Éireann. This is a Council decision with a Title V legal basis. It is in the area of police and co-operation. That is why we need to opt in to it and why I am here seeking the approval of this House. The collection and analysis of PNR data is a widely used law enforcement tool in the EU and in other countries for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crime. PNR data is the booking information provided by passengers and collected by air carriers for their own commercial purposes, such as names and dates of travel or travel itineraries. It can provide the authorities with important elements allowing them to detect suspicious travel patterns and to identify associates of criminals and terrorists, particularly those previously unknown to law enforcement agencies. The use of PNR data is governed by the EU PNR directive, which has been transposed into national law. The Irish passenger information unit within my own Department is the body responsible for processing PNR. Today, I am simply asking Senators to support and opt in to those negotiations so that we can participate on the same basis as other EU member states. We will not be bound into participation in the finalised agreement with the Republic of Korea unless we exercise our right to opt in again when fresh proposals are published at the end of the negotiations. I think it is desirable that Ireland exercise an Article 3 opt-in to this proposal with the Republic of Korea so that we can fully participate in the negotiations as they progress.

I commend the motions to the House. I thank Senators for listening to me and I appreciate the speed with which Seanad Éireann has been able to put these opt-ins on its agenda considering that in respect to the first three of them, I only got Government approval about three hours ago.

Acting Chairperson (Senator Pat Casey): We are highly efficient in this House.

Senator Robbie Gallagher: Yes.

Senator Sharon Keogan: Extremely.

1 o'clock

Senator Eileen Lynch: I welcome the Minister and thank him for being with us today. It is vital that we were discussing the proposed approval of these three European Commission proposals to which our Protocol 21 opt-in applies. As the Minister already noted, these proposals are a vital part of the MFF budgetary package on which negotiations are ongoing and will be for the foreseeable future. These motions will form part of Ireland's engagement with key EU justice and security programmes for the period 2028 to 2034. They relate to four

distinct but interconnected areas. I ask the House to support Ireland's opt-in to the regulation establishing the internal security fund for 2028 to 2034 with a value of €6.8 billion. This fund is central to strengthening security across the European Union. It provides targeted investment in combating terrorism and radicalisation, tackling organised crime, improving cybersecurity and enhancing co-operation between law enforcement agencies.

In recent years, Ireland has faced increased challenges in areas such as cyberthreats, trafficking networks and cross-border criminal activity. Participation in this fund will ensure An Garda Síochána and other agencies can access modern technologies, training and intelligence-sharing networks that no single country could effectively develop alone. It will also facilitate the exchange of information between competent authorities and EU bodies throughout the European Union. I believe that opting into this regulation is not in any way to surrender sovereignty. Rather, it is Ireland choosing to work with its partners in a way that makes citizens safer and strengthens our institutions.

The second motion concerns the asylum migration and integration fund, known as AMIF. This fund supports member states in managing migration in a humane, orderly and respectful manner. This is very topical at the moment, not just here but right across the Union. We have to acknowledge that Ireland is a country built on migration, both outwards and inwards. We know what it is to seek opportunity elsewhere. We also know the responsibilities that come with welcoming people who arrive in our country today. By opting into AMIF for the next programme cycle, Ireland can draw on EU resources to improve our asylum system, support reception facilities, assist integration efforts and ensure that vulnerable migrants receive the supports they require. It is important to note that this fund helps member states to return individuals who do not qualify for protection in a manner consistent with international law and European values. It balances firmness with compassion, ensures both fairness to genuine applicants and integrity of the system as a whole. Co-ordination across Europe is essential in this area. Migration pressures do not recognise borders and our responses cannot be purely national. We need to respond as a Union as this is an issue for most, if not all, EU countries. This opt-in reflects Ireland's ongoing commitment to responsibility sharing and to uphold our obligations in this regard.

The third motion proposes Ireland's participation in the justice programme, again from 2028 to 2034. This programme strengthens judicial co-operation across the Union. It supports training for judges and legal practitioners, improves access to justice for citizens and promotes mutual recognition of judicial decisions. It is important for a small country such as Ireland to have access to these networks and resources. Crime, commercial disputes, family law cases and digital evidence increasingly cross national boundaries. Participation in the justice programme ensures that our legal system remains aligned with best European practice and that our citizens benefit from clear, fair and efficient cross-border processes. It also reinforces the rule of law, an area where Ireland has consistently been a strong voice in the Union. By opting in, we affirm that justice co-operation is not optional. It is core to the functioning of the European project and to the protection of Irish citizens both at home and abroad. We have seen in recent years disrespect towards the rule of law in certain countries and by certain governments, but it is vital that it remains a core principle of the Union and the way in which it functions. I am delighted to highlight how strong Ireland has been in regard to respect for the rule of law.

On a separate note, not linked to Protocol 21, we are asked to approve Ireland's opt-in to a Council decision opening negotiations with the Republic of Korea for a passenger name record, PNR, agreement. Passenger name record data has become a vital tool in combating serious crime and terrorism. It allows authorities to identify high-risk travel patterns while applying strict data protection safeguards. South Korea is a major economic and travel partner of the EU. Establishing a PNR agreement ensures that data exchanges between EU member states and Korea occur within a structured framework that protects privacy while enabling effective law enforcement co-operation. By opting in, Ireland ensures that our national authorities remain fully engaged in shaping that agreement from the outset, rather than at a later date accepting terms which have been set by others. It is both a proactive and responsible course of action.

The motions before the House today reflect Ireland's ongoing commitment to a Europe that is secure, just and fair. They strengthen our capacity to respond to emerging security threats, to manage migration responsibly, to uphold the rule of law and to engage effectively with our international partners. These opt-ins affect the safety of our communities, the fairness of our legal system, the integrity of our borders and, most importantly, the confidence of our citizens in how we manage change and their confidence in the European Union itself. For these reasons I strongly commend the motions to the House.

Senator Sharon Keogan: I welcome the Minister to the House again. He is probably the most active Minister for justice we have seen over the past five years, since I was elected to the House. I wish him well, always, in the work he does. He plays a major role in how our society is going forward.

Today we have been asked to rubber-stamp Ireland's opt-in to two major EU programmes, the internal security fund and the asylum migration and integration fund, for the period 2028 to 2034. On the surface, these sound sensible. There is money on the table. Who would not want extra funding for our underfunded security infrastructure or for migration and border control infrastructure? However, let us call it what it is: cash for sovereignty. Every time we sign up to these schemes, we are not just taking money, we are handing over control. Opting in to the AMIF means binding ourselves to the EU migration pact with its mandatory solidarity mechanism. That means Brussels decides the rules and Ireland either takes relocated migrants or pays €20,000 per head for refusing. Is that sovereignty or is that a cheque with strings attached?

Look at Poland. Donald Tusk has clearly said that Poland will not implement any migration pact that forces it to accept migrants. That is a sovereign stance. The Netherlands and 14 other countries have signed letters demanding tougher rules and external processing. They are pushing back. Meanwhile, in Ireland we nod along, sign up and hope for a few crumbs from the EU table.

Let us talk about the internal security fund. Yes, opting in means more money for cybersecurity and for Garda resources, but again it is our own money coming back with conditions. Those conditions matter to the Irish people. They tie Ireland into the EU security strategies and operational frameworks. That is a slippery slope for a country that values neutrality. Today it is data sharing and infrastructure protection. Tomorrow, it could be deeper integration into EU security and defence policy. We need to ask, where does this end? Are we

comfortable with Brussels shaping our policy priorities and, by extension, our security posture? Yes, we might lose some funding in the short term if we opt out. However, Ireland is a net contributor to the EU budget. We pay more in than we get out. Opting in does not change that, it just means we pay in and then beg for some of our own money back, with conditions attached.

If we are serious about sovereignty, we should opt out of the migration pact entirely and stop this precedent of surrendering control for cash. Instead of meekly signing up, the Government should be throwing its weight around Brussels and demanding a rebate for opt-outs at the next MFF negotiations. Other countries have rebates and we, too, should be negotiating a better deal for what we pay in and setting a precedent that Ireland will defend its sovereignty. For clarity, I do not oppose the approval of the opt-ins to a justice programme, nor to negotiations with the Republic of Korea, but I am calling on this House to vote against the first two motions, on the internal security fund and the asylum, migration and integration fund, because these represent a dangerous trade-off, sovereignty for short-term cash. This is about principle. Do we want to govern ourselves or do we want to be governed by press releases from Brussels? I say stop trading sovereignty for short-term cash. Opt out, stand firm and start using Ireland's position to get a fairer deal for all of our people.

Senator Robbie Gallagher: I welcome the Minister back to the Chamber this afternoon. I compliment him and acknowledge the great energy he has taken to his new role and the progress he has made across a large number of areas. I ask him to continue the good work.

From a Fianna Fáil perspective, we are happy to support the measures outlined here this afternoon by the Minister. It is important, whether it be security or migration, to have an EU approach as they are global issues. We need an EU approach to try to deal with whatever it may be, whether it is security or migration. We only have to look across to our nearest neighbour, the UK, which decided to go it alone, and we can see the issues it has to deal with now. Ultimately, it requires co-operation among all EU states to deal with security, migration or whatever. That is vital.

The funding is also vital. There is a substantial pool of moneys available under the new asylum fund. There is something like €11.9 billion, which is a huge amount of money and a big increase on the €6.2 billion that was there previously. That will go a long way to help co-operation, be that fingerprinting of applications, vetting or whatever. It is important that we have these systems in place. As John Donne, the poet, said once upon a time, "No man is an island", and on this particular issue, I firmly believe we cannot go alone. We will need the co-operation of our neighbours and our EU colleagues to have a proper system in place that can be fair but firm and efficient, which is vital.

The security element of it is something we have to be cognisant of because, unfortunately, there are threats on a daily basis, not just to us but to EU security. Co-operation is vital in that regard because crime does not know any borders. It is a global issue and we need the co-operation of our neighbours to have an adequate system in place to protect ourselves.

I am very happy, on behalf of the Fianna Fáil group, to support the proposals before us. I understand we need the assent of both the Seanad and the Dáil to opt in to them. On behalf of the Fianna Fáil group, I am happy to do that. I wish Deputy O'Callaghan well in his role as Minister.

Senator Nicole Ryan: I welcome the Minister back to the House. I welcome the opportunity to speak on these motions before the House. They relate to the proposed series of opt-ins under Protocol 21. Specifically, we are being asked to approve opt-ins for three major EU regulations: a regulation establishing a Union support for asylum, migration and integration for the period 2028 to 2034, and regulations establishing Union support for internal security and justice programmes for the same period. We are also being asked to consider a separate motion regarding Ireland's proposed opt-in to the EU-South Korea negotiations on the exchange of passenger name records.

These are important issues individually but they are interconnected in ways that go to the heart of sovereignty, democratic oversight and Ireland's capacity to make decisions that serve our national interests. Anytime this House is asked to approve an opt-in under Article 3 of Protocol 21, we must be clear about what that actually means. Under Article 3, Ireland may opt in within three months of a proposal being presented. If we do this, we participate in negotiations but we are bound by the outcome, which will be decided by a qualified majority vote. Ireland does not have a veto, even if the final outcome is contrary to our national interests.

In contrast, Article 4 allows Ireland to opt in after a proposal is adopted, when we have clarity about its implications and what safeguards exist. That safeguard exists for a reason. It is part of what secured Irish public support for the Lisbon treaty. There has been a drip-drip erosion of the safeguard, given the Government increasingly keeps choosing to opt in under Article 3 when there is no compelling need to do so. Each time this happens, we surrender a little more of our sovereignty in the area where the EU has no businesses acquiring additional powers, namely, migration, justice, policing and internal security. These motions must be viewed against the wider backdrop.

Sinn Féin has been clear and consistent. Much of the EU migration and asylum pact is not in Ireland's best interest. Ireland must retain sovereignty if we are to have an immigration system that is fair, efficient and enforceable. Our situation is unique. We are in the EU but we are not in the Schengen area and we share a common travel area with a state that is outside of the EU. That has real consequences for border management, flows of international protection applicants and the obligations the EU now seeks to place upon us.

Government officials have already acknowledged that the EU pact failed to consider the common travel area. They have also admitted there is no estimate of the costs Ireland may incur for non-compliance with the pact requirements. Sinn Féin has supported certain elements, especially the asylum and migration management regulation, AMMR, and Eurodac, because these serve Ireland's interests. However, we oppose the remainder and we continue to oppose any further transfer of powers that impedes Ireland's ability to make independent decisions in this area. These motions before us must be interpreted in a broader context. The AMIF supports a range of activities: the Irish refugee protection programme, the returns programme, reception supports, language provisions, anti-racism initiatives and lots more. It is also used to finance voluntarily returns and deportations. The Government has indicated that charter costs will be claimed under this fund. Crucially, the Minister has described the AMIF as underwriting the implementation of the EU migration pact. That is highly problematic. Opting in under Article 3 would amount to endorsing the pact's architecture, even if indirectly. It would bind Ireland to new structures and new obligations at a time when we lack clarity on

how these impact the common travel area and Ireland's already strained system. Sinn Féin cannot support the Article 3 opt-in to the AMIF on that basis.

The international security fund is linked to the EU's new internal security strategy, ProtectEU. That strategy includes extremely worrying proposals on chat control and the weakening of encryption. *The Irish Times* and numerous digital rights experts have made clear that any attempt to weaken encryption weakens everyone's security. There has already been significant pushback from across Europe and these concerns are real, not hypothetical. Whatever benefits the ISF might contain, they cannot outweigh the risks associated with endorsing or facilitating measures that undermine personal privacy, data protection and cybersecurity. Therefore, Sinn Féin has serious concerns and cannot endorse the Article 3 opt-in here either. The justice programme system is the least contentious of the three. It supports judicial co-operation, training for practitioners and access to justice, issues we broadly support. However, the principle still applies. There is no urgent need to opt in under Article 3 and Ireland should not bind itself prematurely. Article 4 is the safer, more democratic route and there is no justification for bypassing that safeguard.

The PNR motion is distinct. It relates to operating negotiations with the Republic of Korea on the exchange of passenger name record data for the purposes of combating terrorism and serious crime. Sinn Féin has supported previous PNR agreements with Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and other countries because the sharing of PNR data is a necessary and proportionate tool in tackling organised crime, trafficking and terrorism. We also support the emphasis on ensuring PNR data is handled in a way that is necessary, proportionate, limited and rights compliant. Therefore, we support this motion, while reiterating our concerns about the growing tendency to use Article 3 to opt in as a matter of routine. Protocol 21 exists in protection of Irish sovereignty. We should not dilute it. It is also worth noting a policy anomaly. The PNR applies to air passengers but does not apply to ferry travel, despite Ireland's substantial sea border traffic. This loophole undermines the purpose of the PNR and must be addressed.

Sinn Féin opposes Article 3 opt-ins to the AMIF, the internal security fund and the justice programme. These motions represent yet another instance of handing over sovereignty without clear justification in areas where Ireland must retain decision-making powers. Sinn Féin supports an Article 3 opt-in for the PNR negotiations with South Korea, but we do so while emphasising the importance of Protocol 21 and ensuring Irish national interests, not EU convenience, guide every such decision. We will continue to defend Irish sovereignty, challenge the mission creep from Brussels and insist that Ireland, not the EU decides what is best for our best people.

Acting Chairperson (Senator Pat Casey): Before I call Senator O'Reilly, I welcome Senator McCarthy's guest from the Lithuanian chamber of commerce, Mr. Darius Kazakevicius. I also welcome the guests of the Minister of State, Deputy Canney. I hope they all have a good time.

Senator Sarah O'Reilly: I thank the Minister for coming in to debate this. I have serious concerns regarding the motions. The second motion asks the House to endorse a framework that has not yet been defined. We are effectively being asked to give consent for funding mechanisms that will only be agreed later for the 2028 to 2034 budget cycle. The Government

is essentially asking us to vote blindly. EU Commissioner Magnus Brunner has stated that all EU states are under pressure from current migration demands, but there are 12 countries considered high risk due to the large number of arrivals and continuing tensions over the accommodation being provided. Ireland is one of those 12 countries. In 2026, asylum seekers in Spain, Italy, Greece and Cyprus will be relocated to other EU states. Poland, Hungary, Czechia and Slovakia are refusing to take in asylum seekers or contribute financially. If various members states receive exemptions, will the burden fall to us and other states to pick up the slack? Where is the Government's backbone on this? I was shocked that the EU migration Commissioner praised Citywest as an example of best practice. That is so disconnected from reality. To describe housing over 1,000 people in a hotel as best practice is troubling. It sets a dangerously low bar for standards and casts doubt on the assurances we are being given about the EU migration pact.

The first motion seeking Ireland's opt-in to the internal security fund is an alignment with the White Paper for European defence. There is a worrying shift towards increased militarisation across Europe. The Government may deny it, but Ursula von der Leyen has been clear in her objective to see a unified European military. She has previously said that her aim is to become the united states of Europe. Where would our sovereignty be then? Many asylum seekers are arriving into Europe because of global conflicts that are driving displacement. Our priority should be tackling this instability and corrupt governments at source, not funding increased militarisation and warmongering.

Senator Cathal Byrne: I have listened carefully to the debate. It is important and right that these issues are debated in this Chamber. I regret that so few of our colleagues have made their way to the Chamber to discuss this. Immigration is one of the biggest issues affecting the country at present after housing.

Senator Sharon Keogan: Hear, hear.

Senator Cathal Byrne: It is so important that voices from all sides are heard. Regrettably, here we are today with scarce attendance. On this issue, Ireland has to have a tough immigration system that recognises that there are vulnerable people who are coming from the most difficult circumstances who are justifiably recognised as having a successful asylum claim. It also must recognise the fact that there are people coming to the country under false pretences, perhaps with no documents, whose stories do not match what they are saying and who are successfully through the system process, rejected and then have to be deported. To ensure that we have a viable migration system in this country, we have to have resources. To suggest that it is possible for Ireland to go it alone does not reflect the realities of the situation.

It is important that if somebody applies for asylum in a different member state, Ireland's authorities in the Department of justice and An Garda Síochána understand that the person has put in an application with a different country and therefore should be returned to that country to have their application adjudicated upon there in the first instance. We cannot have a situation where people are able to lodge multiple asylum applications as they make their way across Europe and then subsequently come to Ireland to have a separate asylum application adjudicated upon here. It is also important that Ireland has access to fingerprint, arrest and criminal conviction records of people who have made their way to Ireland across Europe

seeking asylum here. The only way we can have access to those two mechanisms is through a shared series of co-operation measures. That is what is proposed here. It is for those reasons and protecting the integrity of our asylum pact system in Ireland that I am supporting these measures.

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O'Callaghan): I thank all the Senators for their contributions. Senator Byrne made a valid point. This is democracy in operation. Many Senators questioned whether we are giving away Irish sovereignty. This is the elected Upper House of the Irish people. We are debating proposals that have been put forward by the European Union. These Houses decide whether or not to go with those proposals. The Government decides whether to put them to these Houses for a vote or not. That is democracy in action. It shows that we are exercising sovereignty over matters that emanate from Europe. We do not have to support these. It is in our interest to do so. The different constitutional Houses of Oireachtas could reject them.

I thank Senator Lynch. I agree with her comments about the threats we are facing. It is a dangerous world out there at present in terms of the increasing threats and different nature of the threats.

I listened carefully to Senator Keogan about the migration pact and how we are giving up sovereignty. We have seen an example of an EU country that decided to go it alone. The United Kingdom decided to go it alone.

Senator Sharon Keogan: I know.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: Its influence and power in the world have reduced since it left the European Union. Part of the reason the United Kingdom left the European Union was it wanted to assert more control over immigration and migration in its countries. It has not been able to do that. We need to be careful in recognising that. There are advantages to being part of a bigger bloc in the world at present. The world is breaking down into different power blocs. I heard somebody accurately describe it on the radio the other day. There was a bipolarity of power blocs during the Cold War. Then we had the hegemony of the United States. Now we are seeing different power blocs arising around the world, such as China, Russia and its allies, the European Union and the United States. Multilateralism seems to have broken down. We are better off being part of a large bloc, otherwise we would be completely forgotten. How long do I have left?

Acting Chairperson (Senator Pat Casey): The Minister has as long as he likes.

Senator Sharon Keogan: Keep going.

Acting Chairperson (Senator Pat Casey): Maybe I should not have said that.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I will not keep going on.

I disagree with the Senator. There are a lot of funds available for us to apply to. We are now a net contributor to the EU. Let us consider the benefits we get out of it as well. Our economy

has been transformed from being a member of the Single Market and the EU. The reason all of these businesses are coming here is we have access to the EU. We do not want to find ourselves in a situation where we go back to the 1950s where we stood alone bravely but it was not a great time financially for our people.

I agree with what Senator Gallagher said about no man being an island. We have to be aligned with others. That is an important emphasis.

Senator Ryan raised the interesting point about opting-in under Articles 3 or 4. There are advantages to either. The advantage of opting-in under Article 3 is that we have an opportunity to try to influence the negotiations for the package. If we go in under Article 4, we just get the package and that is it. We either vote for it or we do not. There are benefits in respect of both. Sometimes an Article 4 opt-in may be preferable, but certainly here there is a big benefit in us going in under Article 3. Similarly, the Senator mentioned the migration pact. Deputy Carthy said we should not have opted-in to the migration pact. We have to follow through what the consequence of that is. If we did not opt in to the migration pact, we would still be bound by the regulations and directives from the earlier part of this century that dealt with international protection or refugee applications as they were described at that stage. Not opting into the migration pact does not solve anything for us, as the position of the UK shows. There is a real advantage in harmonising and speeding up asylum applications across the European Union. Come 12 June next, in the aftermath of that, we will see an efficiency in the system and how it operates.

Senator Ryan also mentioned the issue about the weakening of encryption. That is a very interesting point. There are a lot of people who object to the European Union and Magnus Brunner trying to introduce a directive that would permit access to encrypted messages. The main reason Commissioner Brunner wants this is that he is trying to get agreement on a child sexual abuse regulation. The Senator may know this but I am presuming she does not because it is an issue I discuss out in Europe. There is huge opposition to it coming from certain countries in the European Union and from certain privacy campaigners who say they do not want it because they say it will weaken encryption and it is an interference in their privacy. I know that the Senator and every other Member of this House see nothing wrong in seeking to access information if we are going to be able to use it for the purpose of removing child sexual abuse material.

I listened carefully to Senator Sarah O'Reilly. My understanding on the designation of Ireland is that we are presently at risk of migratory pressure. I hear what she said in respect of other EU countries. Whether we like it or not, immigration and forced movement of people is a very significant part of life in the beginning of the 21st century. People moving around the world is going to be one of the defining characteristics of the first half of the 21st century. The idea that we are just going to be able to establish a situation where nobody wants to come, is not going to happen. If we have crashed the economy and have a disastrous economy, nobody will want to come but in general people want to come into successful and wealthy countries. The policy I am trying to advance is that we have a rules-based system that is fair but firm. If people comply with the rules, they can come in. If they do not, they have to leave. Regarding Citywest, I know the Senator was disappointed with what Commissioner Brunner said about best practice. She said there was a dangerously low bar for standards. I have been out there and have seen the facilities in Citywest for people who are applying for asylum. It is a very

generous response by the State. We are providing people with accommodation while processing their applications. It is a lot better than in other European countries.

Finally, I agree with Senator Byrne. It has been an interesting debate. We do not need big crowds here to have an interesting debate. I always enjoy my time in the Seanad. I will be writing a report card at the end of all the top performing Senators. I am pleased to see they are all here today, including Senator Boyhan.

Acting Chairperson (Senator Pat Casey): I welcome Senator Dee Ryan's son to the Gallery today. I hope his mother is looking after him well and that he enjoys the rest of the day.

Question put: :

The Seanad divided: Tá, 28; Níl, 16.	
Tá	Níl
Blaney, Niall.	Boyhan, Victor.
Boyle, Manus.	Clonan, Tom.
Byrne, Cathal.	Collins, Joanne.
Byrne, Maria.	Craughwell, Gerard P.
Casey, Pat.	Harmon, Laura.
Comyn, Alison.	Higgins, Alice-Mary.
Costello, Teresa.	Keogan, Sharon.
Crowe, Ollie.	McCarthy, Aubrey.
Curley, Shane.	McCormack, Maria.
Daly, Paul.	Mullen, Rónán.
Duffy, Mark.	Murphy, Conor.
Fitzpatrick, Mary.	O'Reilly, Sarah.
Gallagher, Robbie.	Ruane, Lynn.
Goldsboro, Imelda.	Ryan, Nicole.
Kelleher, Garret.	Stephenson, Patricia.
Kennelly, Mike.	Tully, Pauline.
Kyne, Seán.	
Lynch, Eileen.	
Murphy, P. J.	
Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.	
Nelson Murray, Linda.	
Ní Chuilinn, Evanne.	
O'Donovan, Noel.	
O'Loughlin, Fiona.	
O'Reilly, Joe.	
Rabbitte, Anne.	
Ryan, Dee.	
Scahill, Gareth.	

Tellers: Tá, Senators Cathal Byrne and Paul Daly; Níl, s: Tá, Senators Cathal Byrne and Paul Daly.

Question declared carried.

An Cathaoirleach: I welcome Deputy John Paul O'Shea and his guests to the Gallery. I am sure they are from somewhere in Cork North-West. They are most welcome to Seanad Éireann.

Senator Seán Kyne: I move:

That Seanad Éireann approves the exercise by the State of the option or discretion under Protocol No. 21 on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the area of freedom, security and justice annexed to the Treaty on European Union and to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, to take part in the adoption and application of the following proposed measure:

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Union support for asylum, migration and integration for the period from 2028 to 2034, a copy of which was laid before Seanad Éireann on 14th August, 2025.

Question put:

The Seanad divided: Tá, 28; Níl, 17.	
Tá	Níl
Blaney, Niall.	Andrews, Chris.
Boyle, Manus.	Boyhan, Victor.
Byrne, Cathal.	Clonan, Tom.
Byrne, Maria.	Collins, Joanne.
Casey, Pat.	Cosgrove, Nessa.
Comyn, Alison.	Craughwell, Gerard P.
Costello, Teresa.	Harmon, Laura.
Crowe, Ollie.	Keogan, Sharon.
Curley, Shane.	McCarthy, Aubrey.
Daly, Paul.	McCormack, Maria.
Duffy, Mark.	Mullen, Rónán.
Fitzpatrick, Mary.	Murphy, Conor.
Gallagher, Robbie.	O'Reilly, Sarah.
Goldsboro, Imelda.	Ruane, Lynn.
Kelleher, Garret.	Ryan, Nicole.
Kennelly, Mike.	Stephenson, Patricia.
Kyne, Seán.	Tully, Pauline.
Lynch, Eileen.	
Murphy, P. J.	
Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.	
Nelson Murray, Linda.	
Ní Chuilinn, Evanne.	
O'Donovan, Noel.	
O'Loughlin, Fiona.	
O'Reilly, Joe.	
Rabbitte, Anne.	
Ryan, Dee.	
Scahill, Gareth.	

Tellers: Tá, Senators Cathal Byrne and Paul Daly; Níl, Senators Sharon Keogan and Sarah O'Reilly.

Question declared carried.

2 o'clock

Senator Seán Kyne: I move:

That Seanad Éireann approves the exercise by the State of the option or discretion under Protocol No. 21 on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the area of freedom, security and justice annexed to the Treaty on European Union and to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, to take part in the adoption and application of the following proposed measure:

Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Justice programme for the period 2028-2034 and repealing Regulation (EU) 2021/693,

a copy of which was laid before Seanad Éireann on 29th September, 2025.

Question put:

The Seanad divided: Tá, 29; Níl, 12.	
Tá	Níl
Blaney, Niall.	Andrews, Chris.
Boyle, Manus.	Boyhan, Victor.
Byrne, Cathal.	Clonan, Tom.
Byrne, Maria.	Collins, Joanne.
Casey, Pat.	Craughwell, Gerard P.
Comyn, Alison.	McCarthy, Aubrey.
Conway, Martin.	McCormack, Maria.
Costello, Teresa.	Mullen, Rónán.
Crowe, Ollie.	Murphy, Conor.
Curley, Shane.	O'Reilly, Sarah.
Daly, Paul.	Ryan, Nicole.
Duffy, Mark.	Tully, Pauline.
Fitzpatrick, Mary.	
Gallagher, Robbie.	
Goldsboro, Imelda.	
Kelleher, Garret.	
Kennelly, Mike.	
Kyne, Seán.	
Lynch, Eileen.	
Murphy, P. J.	
Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.	
Nelson Murray, Linda.	
Ní Chuilinn, Evanne.	
O'Donovan, Noel.	
O'Loughlin, Fiona.	
O'Reilly, Joe.	
Rabbitte, Anne.	

Ryan, Dee.	
Scahill, Gareth.	

Tellers: Tá, Senators Cathal Byrne and Paul Daly; Níl, Senators Nicole Ryan and Maria McCormack.

Question declared carried.

Senator Seán Kyne: I move:

That Seanad Éireann approves the exercise by the State of the option or discretion under Protocol No. 21 on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the area of freedom, security and justice annexed to the Treaty on European Union and to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, to take part in the adoption and application of the following proposed measure:

Recommendation for a Council Decision authorising the opening of negotiations for an agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Korea on the transfer of Passenger Name Record data from the European Union to the Republic of Korea for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crime,

a copy of which was laid before Seanad Éireann on 14th October, 2025.

Question put and agreed to.

An Cathaoirleach: I welcome Councillor Sarah Kiely from Limerick to the Gallery. She is most welcome here today.

Cuireadh an Seanad ar fionraí ar 2.10 p.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 2.30 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 2.10 p.m. and resumed at 2.30 p.m.

Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2023: Report and Final Stages

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I welcome the Minister of State, Deputy Higgins, and congratulate her on her new role. I look forward to working with her in her new position, as I am sure others in the Chamber do.

Bill received for final consideration.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: When is it proposed to take Fifth Stage?

Senator Gareth Scahill: Now.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Question proposed: "That the Bill do now pass."

Senator Tom Clonan: I thank the Minister of State for coming here this afternoon and congratulate her once more on her new appointment. I thank everybody for allowing this Bill to go forward. I was elected unexpectedly in a by-election in 2022. On my first day in the Chamber, I said I was here to learn, to make friends and to try to make a coalition of people who are willing to support disability rights in the Republic.

This is a very short Bill. It is small, but it contains within it a transformative provision. It redresses an imbalance in the Disability Act 2005 which places an overemphasis on assessment of need. This legislation seeks to create a balance in the 2005 Act by strengthening it and refocusing on the legal right to personal assistance, supports, therapies, surgeries and whatever else a disabled citizen needs to be included. That is consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and it is also consistent with the recently published Government strategy on disabilities. The Bill had an interesting progression. On Second Stage an instruction came from the Cabinet that the Bill be struck down. We then had a very emotional debate in the Chamber. It was one of those very unusual moments when many Government Senators - my colleagues from across the floor - approached me and indicated that they were not going to vote with the Government on its proposed amendment. A compromise was eventually reached, thanks to Senator McDowell, whereby tellers were not appointed and the Bill managed to go through Second Stage.

I cannot tell the Chamber how grateful I am for all the colleagues and friends I have made on the Government side, as well as here in opposition. The former Minister of State, Senator Rabbitte, very kindly allowed the Bill to progress through Committee Stage in May 2024. Indeed, she expressed support for the Bill, which was very welcome. For me, this is a very emotional moment. My son is in the Private Members' restaurant with his assistance dog and his wonderful personal assistant, Giovanni, as guests of the Ceann Comhairle to mark the upcoming International Day of Persons with Disabilities. I apologised to him and said I could not be in the restaurant with him because I would be up here progressing the Bill, to which he replied "good" because I embarrass him as all fathers should.

This Bill brings us into line with the rest of Europe. We are outliers. We are 30 years behind England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland with regard to legislative rights for disabled citizens. We are 50 years behind Germany and most of continental Europe. In fact, we are 75 years behind the German constitution in terms of what it sets out for disabled citizens and the State's responsibilities.

I thank everybody for this. We have parliaments across Europe and in London and Washington that can be very divided and polarised. This is a very powerful example of how one Independent Senator in opposition can bring about change with the support of his colleagues.

I do not like conflict. I know that sometimes in here we have some very robust exchanges. One day I met a very senior person in these Houses who was going down to one of the committees I was sitting on. The person in question knew I had a question to put to him. That very senior person, whom all Members will know, came up to me and asked if he could have a word with me. I said "Yes". He said, "be yourself, do not hold back, be true to yourself, and follow your agenda." While the effect of his advice not to hold back and to be as adversarial as I wanted to be was to make it very difficult for me to do so, I want to recognise the spirit of constructive engagement we get from our colleagues and partners in government. Our primary

purpose as legislators is to try to make things better and to leave something behind after our brief time in office. I know the Bill has completed its passage through this House, but I would like to sit down with the Minister of State and the Minister, Deputy Foley, to see whether it can be progressed in the Dáil. I think we can have a constructive conversation about that. I understand all the challenges around that, but I look forward to working with the Minister and the Minister of State in that regard.

I thank everyone on behalf of our family, all the families and all the citizens, including us. If at some point we become disabled, this legislation will benefit us all.

Senator Victor Boyhan: I warmly welcome the Minister of State and thank her for being here. I also thank my colleague, Senator Clonan. What an achievement. How right he was to pursue what he believed was the right thing to do. He is an outstanding advocate for the disability sector. He is an outstanding advocate in this House for many things and I am terribly proud that he is on our benches in the Independent Group in the Seanad. Persistence and his firm belief in what he was doing convinced everyone in this House.

There were difficulties. The nature of our Parliament is that we have the Government and the Opposition and it is important we have both - in a positive light - to shine on legislation. Legislation is not easy. It is particularly difficult when we have the might of a huge Government as we have had for two or three terms. However, we can achieve a lot. A lot of politics and progress in policy can be achieved by sitting down and talking to a front-line Minister and explaining the difficulties we may have with a Bill.

Senator Clonan persisted. I commend him on sharing. It is not easy to share one's personal circumstances in life because when we talk about ourselves, we are also talking about our families and they do not go into politics. Clearly, Senator Clonan's family was connected to this, including his son Eoghan who I know well, having met him on many occasions. Senator Clonan champions him and treats him as an equal, as he does all other people with disabilities. I have had the pleasure of being in his home and I have met Eoghan, Senator Clonan's lovely wife and family and seen the support they have. Not everyone with a disability has or can have that support for a variety of reasons. That is not to say there is not the support, or willingness of guardians or families to be there.

I thank the Minister of State and the Government. As Senator Clonan said in his few words today, it was an emotional journey. There were many setbacks. There was highly charged engagement and dialogue. The Senator brought it through the Private Members' slot. I also thank my other colleagues who are always supportive of Senator Clonan for prioritising this as the most important piece of Private Members' business since we came into this Seanad. We stuck with it because we believed it was the right thing to do, but Senator Clonan led from the front. He convinced us and everyone else and everyone stayed the course with him. Today is the culmination of all that. It is a day to give thanks to all sides including the Department officials.

There is always the issue of resources, constraints and so on. I will just make one request. This legislation is now coming to its completion. Well done again to Senator Clonan. Let us not let it sit on the shelves to gather dust. Let us all sign up to a commitment to work with the Government to see incremental roll-out of the various passages and what is necessary to make this a living document that people can live with and be supported by. On this and the opposite

side of the House, there is a willingness to progress this matter. I hope we can keep in touch with one another and prioritise the work. There will be incremental parts and difficulties from time to time because of various resources, but the commitment is here.

What are we at the end of the day? Legislators. Someone said to me the other day that there is a lot of noise in Leinster House. Physical noise was not meant, but there is a lot of dialogue, talking, exchange of papers and ideas and exchanges about policy. However, when that is all watered down, what is critical to us as legislators is that Bills are signed into law to become Acts. This will be a legacy, driven by Senator Clonan. It will be Senator Clonan's legacy and that of his family, who took the courage, cited many examples and liaised with many advocacy groups so that at the end of the day we have a concise Bill that will, I hope, find its way to be signed into law. Let us see this as a turning point, marking the beginning of better space, better policy and better supports for people with disabilities. I commend Senator Clonan. Well done.

Senator Pauline Tully: First, well done to Senator Clonan. It is an excellent Bill. It was co-signed by the former Senators Warfield and Gavan from my party and we fully support this Bill. I sat with Senator Clonan and the Minister of State. I congratulate the Minister of State on her appointment to take on responsibility for disability. She has a good understanding of the issues facing disabled people from her time on the disability committee.

The Disability Act is 20 years old this year and it is time it was renewed, updated and reviewed. It was important that guarantees of an assessment of need within six months and a service statement within a month were inserted in that Bill. Unfortunately, while it might be done in many cases, I still encounter families who find it difficult to get their children assessed - different barriers are put in their way - and when the assessment has been carried out, they still do not receive the services they require.

Children who do not get the services and supports they require end up becoming dependent adults and that is not fair. All our citizens, whether they are born with a disability or acquire one through an accident or illness, are entitled to live independent lives and to be given the supports to ensure that can happen so that they will progress in life as children. A year is a short time in a child's life. In fact, six months is short. They grow so quickly and we are missing out on giving them the supports they need to progress in life, participate in education and go on to further education, apprenticeships and the workforce. They cannot do that unless they are provided with an assessment of need and the services they need as a child with progression into adulthood making the transition easier for them.

The Equal Status Act is also from 2000. Again, it needs to be reviewed on a regular basis and updated. All our public services should be accessible to all people. I spoke to a woman last week who was refused admission to a bus because she had a mobility scooter. She was told it was not their policy to accept mobility scooters. The mobility scooter was no bigger than a wheelchair. She was given false information. Another manager said people are absolutely allowed to take mobility scooters on the bus. To be given that information and for someone to be refused access is discrimination. She has used buses loads of times. She could not understand one driver and one manager who were extremely awkward.

We need to ensure that services for children are timely and that adults are able to access whatever supports and services they need to live their best independent lives. They are citizens of our country, they are human beings and that is what they deserve.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I welcome to the Public Gallery Senator Cosgrove's guests from the Sligo-Leitrim Home Youth Liaison Service. I hope they enjoy their visit.

Senator Joe Conway: Tá éacht déanta ag an Seanadóir Clonan inniu. Níl aon obair chomh tábhachtach leis an obair a dhéantar ar son na ndaoine atá níos laige sa chomhluadar atá againn sa tír seo. There is no work more honourable than that done for people who are weaker or labouring under a disability of one type or another. I have been in awe of what Senator Clonan has done in the past few months since I came into the House, his persistence, his vision and his cur i bhfeidhm in seeing it through. He has not tolerated any laggards among our Independent colleagues, who admittedly stood four square behind him on this imaginative legislation. It is a wonderful illustration to us of the great heights to which this House can aspire and rise. It is encouraging for me as a new Member because often I sit on the backbenches and listen to how Minnie the postmistress has retired after 43 years' service or Seanie the pharmacist's assistant was very good to someone last Saturday. I say to myself, "Is this what a house of legislation is meant to be?" I am encouraged by seeing this Private Members' Bill brought to fruition. I thank the Minister of State and the Government for their visionary approach to it and for making sure another chapter is written in the life of our disabled community. Things will be that little bit better as a result of Senator Clonan's work and the Government's acquiescence and encouragement. Go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir.

Senator Eileen Flynn: I welcome the Minister of State to her new role and wish her every success. I care deeply about people with disabilities in this country, about issues of access of care and about having their needs met. When I am listening to myself, I am conscious of referring to people with disability as "them" and "they". Everybody should have equality of opportunity. I do not believe there is any such thing as equality. Everybody is different but it is about meeting a person where they are at and seeing an individual first.

I congratulate Senator Clonan on bringing this important legislation through the Houses. I have been privileged along with the Civil Engagement Group to work with the Senator for the past four and a half years on bringing about important and meaningful change for disabled people. This legislation will do that. It is only three sections. Yesterday, I was talking about women's rights in the Houses and about wearing the colour orange. A woman could be getting beaten up and she does not care what colour you are wearing. It is the same way for people with disabilities.

There are some organisations in the Houses today. I welcome that. It is important we welcome all people to the Houses. One of the activists said to me it was a photo opportunity and it was not even disability day. I said that I had spent many a year being a token with organisations up and down the country. What Senator Clonan is doing is action. I am aware the Minister of State asked the Department to support the first part of the Bill today. We welcome that, but we ask the Minister of State to continue to support what the Senator is trying to do and to listen to activists on the ground. After this discussion, she could go to the Members' restaurant and meet with some of the activists here today.

People are tired of all of us do-gooders talking and saying we want the best for disabled people, women or Travellers. We are all talk and no action, but Senator Clonan has done a piece of work around this Bill. It is three simple changes but it is really effective.

I am delighted the Minister of State is supporting the legislation and so are my Civil Engagement Group colleagues. I always say when talking to Ministers here that they can be part of a legacy that was positive and changed people's lives or they can be part of the same old, same old. I hope with all my heart for the sake of people with a disability that the Minister of State is the one who will make changes and work with Members in this House, the committee and the Dáil. Thank you, Minister of State. Thank you, Senator.

Senator Patricia Stephenson: Senator Flynn mentioned being all talk and no action and the idea people think they are coming into the Oireachtas for a photo opportunity. It is so bleak and so true. We all have a responsibility to do more when we talk about inclusion by actually practising it. That is true across the disability committee and all committees, in ensuring the voices of disabled people are platformed in those spaces. Disability rights issues cut across every forum, whether transport, infrastructure, healthcare, education or even foreign affairs. It is important we note that.

I am very supportive of Senator Clonan's Bill. It will bind the Government to its obligations to provide essential services for people with disabilities. I am happy Ireland will have the opportunity to align with the rest of Europe on its commitments to rights-based legislation for all citizens and shed its reputation, I hope once and for all, as one of the worst places to be a disabled person in Europe. The fact you can have an assessment of need in Ireland, find out about all the things that would help you, make your life easier and support you in living a fulfilled life, and that those services currently are not even actioned on, is shocking. It is like telling someone, "This is the way things could be better for you but, I'm sorry, we're not going to follow through." I hope this legislation will be pursued and will address and put a stop to that practice.

It is sad to say that even this year we have seen a stripping-back of disability services in the most recent budget and that 2026 will be a particularly difficult year for people living with a disability as one-off payments have been removed. In Ireland, being disabled is incredibly expensive. On top of the usual costs we all have, a disabled person must spend another €10,000 to €15,000 per year on things like taxis, because public transport is unreliable - sometimes there is one space for a wheelchair on a given train service and it has to be booked far in advance - on medicine and medical needs, accessibility aids at home and home adaptations. That means their entrance fee to participate in life in Ireland is much higher than for the rest of us. They are faced with barriers to healthcare, education, employment and transport.

I think most people would agree that, quite frankly, disabled people are being fleeced in many ways. In order for people with disabilities to participate fully in our society, it is imperative that all services they attend address the diversity of their needs. It is not enough for the HSE to shrug its shoulders and say, "We're sorry. We can't fulfil your specific needs. It's too expensive. It's too complex. It's too much hassle for us." I know there are amazing service providers in the HSE who wish they could do more but the options are not there for them because of the cost of services and because this is not prioritised.

Disabled people should no longer hear, "We'll get to it as soon as we have time." People with disabilities cannot afford to wait for their needs to be considered. We have heard from the Disability Federation of Ireland that disabled people have a much higher risk of poverty and deprivation. If you are unable to work due to disability, you are four times more likely than

the national average to live in consistent poverty. We have shameful rates when it comes to people with disabilities in employment and supported employment opportunities. That is true across the island and there is much more work that can be done through an all-island approach to supported employment.

I wonder why it cannot be a function of Government agencies to just say, "Yes, we'll help you. We'd be delighted to. We've got the resources. We've got the will and we're going to do it." to those in our society who deserve support the most. The Government grants tax breaks and kickbacks to rich property developers and multinational fast food conglomerates. I know the Minister of State might not agree with that but that is what we saw in the most recent budget. It makes the failures for people with disabilities so much more insulting and shameful. I recognise that was not the Minister of State's brief when the budget came through.

People with disabilities are not asking for the world; they are simply asking for the same rights the rest of us have. They want to be able to contribute meaningfully to society and live fulfilled lives like we all do; currently in Ireland, that is not happening. Disability services are not things the Government can offer by way of patronising piecemeal handouts. People with disabilities have a basic right to advance through education, to pop into town to meet up with friends, to access healthcare screenings and to get a job, should they wish. They should have the right to live independently, if they choose to, and to codesign policies that consider their needs and opinions.

Disability rights are basic human rights and must be enshrined in legislation. That is why I am delighted to support Senator Clonan's Bill. He has been a consistent advocate for disability rights throughout his time as a Senator. We cannot have resilient communities or communities that prosper if a huge proportion of them are excluded from meaningful inclusion.

Senator Aubrey McCarthy: I commend my colleague Senator Clonan on this disability Bill. I am on the same university panel as him, so technically we were meant to compete.

3 o'clock

When I first met Tom, I told him what I was involved in. I set up a charity called Tiglin. It does not deal with people with disabilities, but people who have come from marginalised circumstances, such as homelessness, etc. The first thing he said was that he wanted to see what I do. He came out and visited our centre in Greystones. He spent time with the guys and asked questions. He was looking for answers to see how it works and what type of people we reach.

That sums up the man who is behind this Bill and it shows that he has an interest in people who are marginalised, people who are on the outside and in isolation. I met his son, Eoghan, who is champion in his own right. What is the name of the dog?

Senator Tom Clonan: Leahy.

Senator Aubrey McCarthy: I met the two of them and they have both been in the house many times. I also, of course, met them in Trinity College. As part of the Seanad Independent Group, I commend Senator Clonan on this achievement. I congratulate the Minister of State on her new portfolio and know this is something she will champion as well. On behalf of

myself, a new Senator in this role, and as part of the Seanad Independent Group, I commend Senator Clonan.

Senator Lynn Ruane: I welcome the Bill and am happy to support Senator Clonan. Senator McCarthy raised the areas of marginalisation and addiction. Something we need to consider is marginalisations within marginalisations within marginalisations. We do have a growing and ageing population of people who were drastically impacted by the heroin epidemics of the eighties and nineties and have acquired disabilities over time. They are often unseen when it comes to disability advocacy. We have people in our prison and homeless systems who have acquired disabilities through intravenous drug use and through certain conditions where their bodies have begun to break down. They have ended up in wheelchairs and had limbs amputated. Their rights are eroded in every way, never mind them getting an assessment and then having the right to care. It is a group that I would like us to start thinking and talking about when we talk about people who are living with a disability. Like I said, there are extra layers of marginalisation and it is often a group that we do not pick up on. I just thought about it when Senator McCarthy was speaking about addiction.

Minister of State at the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (Deputy Emer Higgins): I thank all of our Senators who have contributed today, in particular Senator Clonan for bringing forward this Bill forward. It is great to hear that his son Eoghan is in the House. I am sure it is an important day for him. I reassure Senator Flynn that I dropped into that event the Ceann Comhairle is hosting today for the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. It is a really good initiative.

I welcome the opportunity to speak to the House to reassure its Members that this Government is fully committed to people with disabilities and their families. I, of course, acknowledge that there are really important challenges that we must address if disability services in this country are to fully meet the needs and expectations of those at the heart of the service to enable them optimise their potential and to be able to live their lives as they deserve. This Government supports the intent of the Bill and has chosen not to oppose it on that basis. I must, however, point out that there are significant challenges in the reality of the fact that the State has limited resources.

As Senator Tully said earlier, I spent a number of years with her and other Members of this House and the Dáil as a member of the Committee on Disability Matters. I am delighted to have the opportunity to attend here today in my new role as Minister of State with responsibility for disability. I look forward to continuing the work of my predecessor, the Minister of State, Deputy Hildegard Naughton, in what is a really important area. The Government has clearly signalled its intent to support disabled people. This can be seen across a number of areas.

Senator Stephenson referenced the recent budget. Budget 2026 saw a record €3.8 billion allocated for HSE disability services. This represents €618 million extra, or a 20% uplift, in current funding on 2025. It follows significant year-on-year increases in recent years and an overall increase of €1.85 billion, or 91%, since 2020.

Notwithstanding that significant investment, all of us know of the frustrations that individuals and families experience when it comes to accessing the services they need. Over the last week, since my appointment as Minister of State with responsibility for disability, I have been out in

communities meeting people with disabilities, their families, carers, the volunteers supporting them and getting a clear sense of the barriers people are facing every single day. I look forward to continuing that work over the coming weeks and months ahead. I have also had the opportunity over the past week to meet with some of the dedicated professionals delivering those much-needed services through section 38 and 39 organisations, the HSE and also through my committed officials in the Department who I know are driving policies that will improve access to services.

I want to be clear in saying to Members that the Government is listening to families and is working towards further significant investment and reform in the months ahead. That is part of a radical transformation programme across disability services. While not opposing this Bill, at this stage, I firmly believe that our focus must be on continuing to implement a programme of operational, policy and legislative reforms which will improve access to therapies and services for children with disabilities. I think that is a goal we all share and I really look forward to working with Members to make that happen.

Question put and agreed to.

Cuireadh an Seanad ar fionraí ar 3.06 p.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 4.32 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 3.06 p.m. and resumed at 4.32 p.m.

Irish Film Board (Amendment) Bill 2025: Committee and Remaining Stages

Acting Chairperson (Senator Anne Rabbitte): I welcome the visitors from the Wexford Chamber of Commerce. They are the guests of Deputy Verona Murphy, the Ceann Comhairle. The Minister is also very welcome to the House this afternoon.

Sections 1 and 2 agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment.

Acting Chairperson (Senator Anne Rabbitte): When is it proposed to take the next Stage?

Senator Alison Comyn: Now.

Acting Chairperson (Senator Anne Rabbitte): Is that agreed? Agreed.

Bill received for final consideration.

Acting Chairperson (Senator Anne Rabbitte): When is it proposed to take the next Stage?

Senator Alison Comyn: Now.

Acting Chairperson (Senator Anne Rabbitte): Is that agreed? Agreed.

Question proposed: "That the Bill do now pass."

Minister for Culture, Communications and Sport (Deputy Patrick O'Donovan): I thank the Seanad for facilitating the Bill. As Members know, it is a technical Bill. It is really to make sure that the Irish Film Board, more commonly known to all of us as Screen Ireland, will have an adequate amount of money available to it. I intimated in the course of the discussions with Oireachtas Members that is my intention to bring a more substantive Screen Ireland Bill before the Oireachtas in the new year to deal with some of the issues the Senators raised during the debate in the House, including the importance of film visual effects, gaming and all of the other issues raised. I hope to be back in the new year with a more substantive Bill. I thank the Seanad for the speedy movement of this Bill, which makes a big difference to Screen Ireland and the work it is doing.

Senator Alison Comyn: I echo the words of the Minister. This is warmly welcomed, and I am delighted to see it go through with unanimous cross-party agreement. I spoke at length last week, so I will not repeat myself except to say this will make a huge difference to independent and all screen producers and filmmakers across the country. I look forward to seeing the fruit of its labour and to seeing the Bill progress even further.

Acting Chairperson (Senator Anne Rabbitte): I thank the Minister and his officials for their co-operation.

Question put and agreed to.

Cuireadh an Seanad ar fionraí ar 4.35 p.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 4.40 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 4.35 p.m. and resumed at 4.40 p.m.

Fishing Industry: Motion

Senator Manus Boyle: I move:

That Seanad Éireann:

- acknowledges the appointment of a Minister of State with responsibility for Fisheries, and for the Marine, as part of Programme for Government commitments;
- acknowledges the challenges faced by Irish fishermen and women due to anticipated quota reductions driven by the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) scientific advice, rising operational costs, and the impact of international agreements on the sustainability of the sector;
- notes the vital economic, cultural, and social importance of the fishing industry to coastal communities across Ireland;
- notes the investment by Government in our ports, under the Fisheries Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme;
- expresses concern that third countries, including Norway, refuse to set total allowable catches in line with the ICES advice;

- considers that this irresponsible behaviour demonstrates that these third countries do not see the EU as an equal partner in managing our stocks of shared interest;
- expresses concern about the access granted to third countries, including Norway, to fish in Irish waters under current arrangements;

calls on the Government to:

- invoke the relevant Hague Preferences, at the appropriate time;
- oppose any further concessions that allow third countries disproportionate access to Irish waters, while showing disregard for ICES scientific advice;
- safeguard and develop shore-based services, including fish processing, storage, and transport infrastructure, to maintain employment and economic activity in coastal regions;
- increase investment in modernisation and safety measures for the fishing fleet;
- provide targeted supports for small-scale and inshore fishers to ensure the viability of traditional fishing communities; and
- enhance enforcement and monitoring to protect Irish waters from illegal or excessive fishing activities by non-EU vessels.

Senator Noel O'Donovan: I second the motion.

Acting Chairperson (Senator Anne Rabbitte): Are the Senators sharing time?

Senator Manus Boyle: Yes.

Acting Chairperson (Senator Anne Rabbitte): Is that agreed? Agreed.

Senator Manus Boyle: I thank the Acting Chairperson, the Minister of State and my esteemed colleagues for coming in. I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important motion tonight. It goes to the heart of the matter. It is not only strategic, but economic and deeply cultural and profoundly human, for the future of the Irish fishing industry and coastal communities depend on it.

I acknowledge the appointment of a dedicated Minister of State with responsibility for the marine, Deputy Dooley, as part of the programme for Government commitments. This is not merely a procedural development but a symbolic gesture that reflects the recognition at the high level of the Government that the marine sector, our fisheries, our coastal infrastructure, aquaculture and offshore require focused leadership, a clear strategic voice and a consistent voice at the Cabinet table. For far too long, marine issues were dispersed across multiple Departments, diluting accountability and slowing progress. The Minister of State for the marine is a welcome step towards better co-ordination, stronger policy delivery and a deeper appreciation of what the sea means for Ireland, not only economically but environmentally, culturally and societally.

However, we all know that the existence of a dedicated Minister does not on its own resolve the mounting difficulties faced by Ireland or its fishing communities when Ireland's industry is operating in one of the most challenging environments in decades. Quota reductions agreed at EU level, influenced by international negotiations, have cut deeply into the viability of the fishing enterprise. Brexit, in particular, has had devastating consequences. Ireland handed back far more quota proportionally than any EU member state. This imbalance is still being felt in our ports, on our piers and in our households and fishing families from Donegal to Cork, Howth, Dunmore East, Dingle, Castletown and many others. Rising operational costs, fuel prices, increased insurance, maintenance and regulatory compliance are pushing stakeholders to the brink. For some small-scale inshore fishermen and women, the pressures are magnified even further. Many are operating on tight margins and in some cases below the threshold of viability.

If these structural pressures were not enough, the impact of international agreements, including those granting access to non-EU states, have left many feeling devastated. They see others fishing in Irish waters while they themselves are constrained by reduced quotas. The question arises: how can this be fair? How can Europe allow this?

It is impossible to overstate the importance of the Irish fishing industry. Economically, it contributes hundreds of millions of euro annually, but the true value of the industry cannot be captured in figures alone. For many of our coastal communities, fishing is the backbone of our local employment, an anchor in our social activity and the source of our inherent identity.

Fishing is not only a job; it is our heritage. It is a culture built on skills, courage and respect for the sea. Places such as Killybegs, Castletown, Kilmore Quay, Howth, Union Hall and Greencastle are not simply points on a map; they are living communities that define their relationship with the ocean. The loss or decline of fishing activities in these towns is not merely an economic blow that threatens our very existence.

We also must acknowledge the substantial investment undertaken by the Government through the fishery harbour and coastal infrastructure development programme. This investment has delivered upgraded piers, improved safety features, enhanced berthing facilities, and vital modifications across the fishery harbour centres and numerous small community harbours.

Infrastructure investment is more than concrete and steel. It is the foundation of an economic activity. Modern ports are essential if we expect our fleets to operate safely, efficiently and competently. They also are the backbone of our shore-based services, such as processing facilities, cold storage, ice plants and service industries, such as net makers and engineering companies.

While the programme for Government is welcome, we cannot be complacent. Investment must continue, and in some cases be accelerated, if we are to sustain our fishing industry's future long term.

One issue that has become deeply contentious is the access granted to third countries, most notably Norway, to fish Irish waters under current arrangements. Let me be clear: Ireland is not opposed to an equal, balanced international agreement. We understand that fishery management is a shared responsibility and co-operation is essential for sustainability, but the perception and the reality is that Ireland has given far too much and received little or nothing in return.

Irish waters are among the richest fishing grounds in Europe, yet fishermen and women are being squeezed from both sides by reduced EU quotas and the arrangement that allows non-EU states to fish species they themselves have limited or no access to inside their own jurisdiction. This is not defensible. It is not fair and it is not sustainable. For that reason, this motion calls on the Government to advocate for fairer quota allocations for Ireland at EU level. I wholeheartedly support this.

This motion continues to press the European Commission, the Council of Ministers and our fellow member states to address the problems created by Brexit and other negotiations. Ireland should not carry a disproportionate burden of the loss. We must insist on a review mechanism of the Common Fisheries Policy, CFP, a rebalancing of the shares and a future framework that recognises the scale Ireland has contributed to the EU, EU waters and conservation.

This motion calls on the Government to oppose any further concessions that allow third countries disproportionate access into Irish waters. We must speak with clarity on this and with fairness. Our waters are a natural resource. They must serve the interest of the Irish people, first and foremost. Any further agreements must be generally reciprocal and negotiated with transparency and demonstrate the benefits to the Irish fishing sector. There is no justification for granting expanded access to countries that already benefit from arrangements the Irish regard as excessive.

Third, this motion rightly emphasises the need to safeguard and develop our shore-based services, such as processing facilities, cold storage, freezing capacity, transport, logistics infrastructure, repair and maintenance service, and in value-added seafood enterprises. These services are the lifeblood of coastal employment. Without them, fish simply pass through our ports and leave no economic footprint behind them. If we want to maintain competitive, sustainable communities, we must ensure that fish caught in Irish waters are also processed, stored, distributed and, ideally, branded and marketed in Ireland. We should not accept the trend whereby raw product leaves our shore only to return as a more valuable imported product. This is not a vision of a modern, resilient seafood sector.

This motion calls for investment, modernisation and safety for the fishing fleet. Our fishermen and women undertake one of the most dangerous professions in the world. They deserve vessels that are safe, efficient and compliant with evolving standards. They deserve access to grant schemes to support engine upgrades, fuel efficient technology, improved safety equipment and vessel modernisation. Modernisation is not a luxury. It is a necessity for survival in competitive European and world markets.

We must target support for small-scale inshore fishing enterprises. These people are often the backbone of rural communities. They maintain the tradition, supplying local markets, and they have a minimal environmental footprint, yet they are also the most vulnerable to cuts and rising costs. Government support must be tailored to their needs. The sustainability of our coastline depends on the survival of these small enterprises. This motion calls for enhanced enforcement and monitoring to protect Irish waters from illegal or extensive fishing activities by non-EU vessels. That is essential. Ireland must defend its maritime sovereignty. We must ensure that vessels operating in our narrow waters adhere strictly to quotas, conservation rules and safety standards. We must insist that we get patrol capacity, surveillance technology, data systems and intelligence sharing. The regulatory framework for the sustainability of our marine resources depends on this.

This is not an abstract policy debate. These issues are felt deeply and personally in the homes of fishing families across the country. The motion recognises the challenges facing the fishing industry and its members, the need for stronger advocacy within the EU, the importance of defending our waters from disproportionate access, the role of the shore-based services in our coastal economies, the need for modern safe vessels, the vulnerability of our small-scale fishing enterprises, and the importance of robust enforcement to protect the fishing stock. In essence, it is a call for fairness, sustainability and a future vision for Ireland's fishing industry that will bring new opportunities. For generations, our coastal communities have lived with the sea. They have respected and relied on the sea and have contributed immensely to our national identity. We owe them not only respect but also action. This motion is a step forward towards action. I call for fairness, a fair balance and for the protection of the sector that has shaped Ireland for centuries. We must stand together and united. I am pleased to support the motion and I encourage all members of this House to do likewise.

Senator Noel O'Donovan: I thank the Minister of State for being here. It is really welcome that fisheries are being discussed by means of this motion. That is not to say the issue of fisheries has not been discussed in decades gone by. With the programme for Government and the introduction of a Minister of State for the marine and fisheries and a committee to discuss fisheries, however, there is now a new and solid footing for representing the issues here.

As the Minister of State is aware, I represent west Cork, which has a proud fishing tradition at many of its ports. I developed an interest in fishing with my late uncle. We did a bit of leger fishing, ending up at the pier at Union Hall to watch the boats coming in and out. I remember the size of the fish coming in, including the big tuna. I used to love to be there to watch it all happening. It is not happening any more. That, to me, is wrong.

There is a sense of injustice in the fishing industry. When you talk to people, they will blame politicians and say fishing is a lost cause and that nothing can be done. They are right to say it, but there is a small minority still in existence who have hope. They see hope on the horizon that fishing finally has a place and is going to be taken seriously by the Government. We have to have results in the coming years to sustain that hope.

I am delighted to formally second this motion on the future of the fishing industry. The sector that sustained coastal communities for generations and now faces one of the most difficult periods in its history. To be straight and honest without being alarmist, it faces total annihilation. To understand today's crisis, we must be honest about how we got here. When Ireland entered the Common Fisheries Policy in the 1980s, it had extensive waters and stocks but ended up with a deal that has brought us to where we are now. The deal we accepted then was deeply unfair and its consequences have shaped every decade since. Climate change has added pressures on stocks. Visiting fleets, as Senator Boyle mentioned, have added more to worsening the crisis within the industry. This is having an impact on communities that they can no longer sustain.

The Irish fishing community has called out overfishing for years, but what it had to say in that regard has fallen on deaf ears in Europe. We have to be honest about that. The dogs in the street know what has happened in the fishing sector. The central question now is how Ireland can continue in the context of its current quota share. The facts say that we cannot do so, not

if we expect thriving ports, viable processors and a meaningful future for the next generation of Irish fishermen.

There is another threat we must confront, and that is the danger of division. Some would set inshore against offshore and small boats against large boats. Division serves others in Europe but it does not serve Ireland well. If we go to Brussels divided, we go weakened. If we stand together, we stand strong. I am glad to see much progress in recent years to bring unity to the sector.

I want to tackle a damaging myth that can often be peddled in the media, including social media, namely the idea that Ireland's challenges are the fault of a handful of so-called large fishermen. These large operators are Irish employers. They support Irish ports and processing and operate under Irish rules and the Irish tax regime. They are not the cause of our historical disadvantage. The root problem has always been the size of the deal Ireland received, not the size of the boats that stayed loyal to this country. What can we do now, within our own control? First, we must have targeted financial supports to modernise the fleet and sustain processors. Second, there should be a succession plan benefiting young people who want to enter the industry. We have a green certificate for farming, so let us have a blue certificate for the fishing industry. Third, we should ensure sensible consolidation in both the fleet and processing sector, not ports. However, we need to support this.

There is potential in the industry that must be recognised. It is not too late to continue to carry out this work. However, national measures alone cannot correct a structural injustice created at European level. That is why the upcoming December Agriculture and Fisheries Council and a much talked about review of the Common Fisheries Policy are critical for the industry's survival. The Seafood Alliance has some clear points in an emergency plan. I urge the Minister of State to ensure Ireland enters the upcoming negotiations and the Common Fisheries Policy review with clear priorities. These are the fundamental revision of quota shares, reflecting Ireland's role as a major coastal state; fair burden sharing for the post-Brexit era; stronger protection for our waters; a policy that rewards climate responsibility; and one strong Irish negotiating position that is cross-departmental, at ministerial level and involving stakeholders. The fishing industry is not seeking special treatment; it is seeking fair treatment, a fair share of the resource that surrounds this island and a fair chance to survive. My commitment, which I hope is the commitment of this House, is to stand with our fishermen, crews, processors and coastal towns and villages throughout the country. Ireland is a proud maritime nation and deserves fairness. By God, we will fight for it.

Senator Joe Conway: I would like to say a special word of welcome to the Minister of State, Deputy Dooley, who is here in his capacity as Minister of State for fisheries. I wish him the very best in his work. Go n-éirí go geal leat, Timmy.

On 1 January 1973, we acceded to what was known at the time as the European Economic Community. A little more than a half-century has passed since. Almost universally in our history, the economic and social well-being of this country have been greatly uplifted by our being a member of the European Economic Community, or, as it is now referred to, the European Union. However, if there is one section of our economic life that has bucked the trend of progression, it is our maritime fisheries, as is evident from what has happened to them in the past 50 years.

In 1986, as a young teacher, I was appointed as principal of the local boys' school in Dunmore East. I worked there among the community for 19 years after that. While I never got my feet wet on board a beamer, I got to know very well the children from the fishing community, how the community lived and worked, and the tradition of fishing that was so vibrant in Dunmore East. That was then and this is now. In 1973, the year we acceded to the European Economic Community, we were experiencing the peak of our fishing years. There were dozens of trawlers home-ported in Dunmore East and annual landings measured in tens of thousands of tonnes. The oral history from people like Billy Power in Dunmore East suggests fishing in the town gradually rose to the heady days of the 1970s and 1980s. Dunmore East remains one of the six designated landing harbour centres, alongside Killybegs, Rosaveel, Daingean, Castletownbere and Howth, but the fleet is much smaller now. The redesignation of Dunmore East as a landing port for UK vessels in 2023 helped but the Irish-registered fleet itself has been greatly reduced since the 1970s. Current estimates suggest there are between 15 and 20 active home-ported vessels in Dunmore East.

5 o'clock

While precise figures for Dunmore East alone are not published, national records from 1973 show there were landings in excess of 200,000 tonnes annually. Dunmore East contributed a significant amount then, somewhere between 20,000 tonnes and 30,000 tonnes per year. In 2023, catches were constrained by the EU's dreaded quota and sustainability rules. Approximately 90% of all Irish fish landings occurs through those six ports aforementioned. Dunmore East annual landings are now estimated to be between 5,000 tonnes and 10,000 tonnes, consisting primarily of nephrops and mixed demersal species. Gone are the days when there was a persistent drive in whitefish and herring chasing. The contextual note of the decline from 1973 to 2023 reflects the broad trends from Dunmore East through the Irish sea fisheries 50 years later. Significant features include: fleet consolidation, with fewer but larger vessels; horrific quota restrictions with the EU's Common Fisheries Policy; shifts in target policies from herring to whitefish; and economic diversification in the regions around the Wild Atlantic Way and Dunmore East with tourism. All of these things have impacted on the community there.

It has been 52 years since we joined the European Union. As a political scholar and someone who has observed these things, I cannot think of any section of time in those 52 years where certain parties were in charge of the running of the country. When it comes to fishing – it gives me no great pleasure to say this – we have an expression in politics and general life that someone was "asleep at the wheel". That expression might be changed a little bit with regard to the Governments that looked after our fisheries in the past 52 years. They were not asleep at the wheel but, rather, fast asleep in the wheelhouse. That is why we are left with this. It is a bit rich to stand here today talking about regenerating our industry when we have seen the decimation done. It was not Billy Power or Joe Taylor down in Dunmore East who did the negotiating; it was our Governments during that time. The expression "Late have I loved thee" is relevant in this regard. It is a Damascene conversion that we see here today. I applaud the people in the Government who are bringing forward this motion because even though it is late in the day to be talking about saving Irish sea fishing, it is a worthwhile motion. Of course, I support it and so does everyone in the Seanad Independent Group. However, a lot of damage is being done and I know, as do all Members, who was in charge when all of that damage was done.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I welcome Deputy Neville and his guests to the Gallery. I hope they enjoy their visit to Leinster House today.

Senator Niall Blaney: First, I am delighted to support my Donegal colleague's motion on sea fisheries. I congratulate him on bringing it forward. Fianna Fáil welcomes this debate and will not be opposing the motion. I am delighted that the Minister of State is here. That he has his key officials with him shows the importance he is offering to the motion put in front of the House today. I commend him on being here.

Ireland's waters are one of our most valuable natural resources. Our coastline of 7,500 km is one of the longest in the EU. Fianna Fáil deeply values the role of fisheries in the future of our country and those who rely on this activity for their livelihood. The one part of the motion I wish to highlight the most is where it calls on the Government to oppose any further concessions that allow third countries disproportionate access to Irish waters while showing disregard for the scientific advice of ICES. That is really the key point at the moment, considering negotiations that the Minister of State is in the middle of and those that will take place over the next month or two. It is a pertinent part of the motion. I wish the Minister of State well in his negotiations.

We have now re-established the role of the Minister of State. He is in place and has secured a significant budget of €157.7 million to support the fisheries sector for 2026. That has to be welcomed. This funding will continue to provide supports to key capital infrastructure projects in our fishery harbour centres, the seafood development programme and the important work carried out by our marine agencies.

The recommendations of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea on 2026 fish stocks poses a significant challenge. At EU level, the Council of Ministers is expected to vote on the annual total allowable catches, TAC, and quotas regulation on 12 and 13 December 2025.

Fianna Fáil is committed to continue to support our fishing communities and agriculture sectors. I grew up in Donegal and visited places like Killybegs and Greencastle. I was also a member on the council with Senator Boyle's father. I have seen how deeply people have fought over the years for the rights of fishermen and fish stocks. It is a tradition that is, in some way, in dire need of Government attention. I know we are giving that attention now with the appointment of the Minister of State to this role but we have a job on our hands. Even if you just take the mackerel quota, there is strain there. These third countries are posing an awful problem for us.

At both EU and international level, we will stand up for fisheries in quota negotiations in order to return the maximum yield while maintaining stock levels according to the latest scientific evidence.

I will finish with the point I made regarding the overfishing by third countries. It is important that we use whatever mechanisms we can find at EU level to stop countries like Norway overfishing. In the context of fishing, it is important that we do not forget our inshore fishermen and how important they are. That is another day's work, but they play an important part in the fishing sector. I thank the Minister of State for coming to the House today.

Senator Joanne Collins: I move amendment No. 1:

After the last paragraph under “calls on the Government to:”, to insert the following paragraph:

- “stand up for our Irish fishing communities by demanding our fair share of the fish in Irish waters and by challenging the failings in the existing Common Fisheries Policy that facilitate this injustice.”

Senator Chris Andrews: I second the amendment.

Senator Joanne Collins: I welcome the Minister of State. It is great to have him here. I welcome the motion and the opportunity to strengthen it through the amendments that we have tabled this evening. We also acknowledge the importance of having a Minister of State for marine affairs. Acknowledgement is not enough, however. Our fishing communities are in crisis. The recent report from An Bord Iascaigh Mhara suggesting that everything is fine has been described by industry leaders as offensive and unacceptable. The reality on the ground is stark. Boats are tired, crews are exhausted and coastal economies are on the brink. Our pelagic sector is facing what industry has called an economic Armageddon.

Scientific advice for 2026 shows massive cuts, such as a cut of 70% to mackerel and 41% to blue whiting, yet those cuts are not the result of Irish actions. Irish fishermen follow the science and rules. The crisis has been caused by rogue and reckless fishing by Norway, Iceland and other countries, facilitated by weak international oversight and EU inaction. Irish fishermen are paying the price for other nations’ bad behaviour. While this is happening, Norway and others are still being granted access to Irish waters. This is why the motion must be clear. Ireland must oppose any further concessions that give third countries disproportionate access to our waters. I have also added an essential line in this amendment, one that speaks directly to the heart of the problem, namely, to “stand up for our fishing communities by demanding our fair share of the fish in Irish waters and by challenging the failings of the Common Fisheries Policy that facilitate the injustice”. Ireland controls 12% of EU waters but receives 6% of the quota. That imbalance worsened after Brexit. Our communities bore the cost and cannot continue to accept it.

The impact is real. Up to 837 jobs in the pelagic catching sector are at risk. That is more than 2,300 when the indirect jobs are included. This could mean a €200 million hit to the seafood economy. In many places, fishing families are telling us they are the last generation. That is actually shocking to hear when you think of what it means to this country to have fishing. Industry matters too. The Government has invested in some ports, harbours and piers under the fisheries, harbour and coastal infrastructure programme and the Brexit adjustment reserve. However, many coastal communities have seen nothing. That is why my amendment clarifies the investment has been selective and not sector-wide.

The motion also calls for targeted supports for traditional fishing communities. I have amended it to ensure it includes small-scale inshore and island fishermen and women. Island and inshore communities are too often forgotten. These are the people fishing single-handedly, facing soaring costs with no stability and no safety net. Ireland must also secure the Hague preferences as compensation to these devastating quota cuts. We need emergency financial

supports to protect vessels, jobs and processing plants. We need a stronger voice in Europe. Many in the industry have called for a permanent Fish Ireland office in Brussels, something Government really should explore, and urgently. At the core of all of this is fairness. Our coastal and island communities are not looking for favours. They are looking for justice. They deserve the same protection and respect given to others.

This motion, strengthened by the amendments, is a clear statement from this House: Ireland must demand its fair share of our own natural resources. The reckless overfishing by other nations cannot be rewarded. The Common Fisheries Policy must be fundamentally reformed and fishing communities - coastal, inshore and island - must have a viable future. Our heritage, our jobs, our coastal economies and sovereignty of our own waters are at stake. The era of managed decline must end. The State needs to fight for its fishers and not apologise for them.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Before we move on, I welcome guests of Deputy John Connolly. They are students from the University of Galway and they are very welcome here this evening. I hope they enjoy their visit here today.

Senator Paul Daly: I welcome the Minister of State and compliment my Fine Gael colleagues on the motion. We are obviously supporting it.

I live in a place called Kilbeggan and you cannot get any more central in the country than there. Yet, having said that, traffic permitting and without breaking the speed limit, I can be on the west coast or the east coast in an hour and 15 minutes maximum. If you were that close to a coast in many other countries, you would say you lived on the coast. I can never figure out why we do not eat more fish as an island nation. A big part of the Minister of State's work going forward would be to promote the produce of our fishermen and fisherwomen on our own island. We need to evolve into fish eaters. That would go halfway to solving the problems.

There are many problems there. The Minister of State has inherited a bit of a minefield. I note the Council meeting that is coming up. Our total allowed catch would be a lot less if it was not for the Hague preferences and I know there is pressure being put on by the French and Dutch, in particular, that the Hague preferences might not kick in on this occasion. That is something that must be fought hard against.

As an inland beef farmer, the fishermen saved the day when it came to Brexit. That has to be recognised and acknowledged by other sectors. The Government could and should allocate a little bit more of our own funding towards the sector. That could and should be explained to the other sectors, even if it was a little bit of robbing Peter to pay Paul. I will not be thanked by the people in my own sector for saying what I am saying, but the fishermen and fisherwomen saved the day. Brexit would have wiped a lot of other sectors off the map. The sacrifice was made by the fishing sector. It would be appropriate they would get rewarded for that.

I would like to see a scheme for fishermen, and the inshore fishermen and fisherwomen in particular, that is similar to TAMS in the other agricultural sectors. Senator Boyle said it. There are schemes there at the moment. I know the Minister of State is tied on this somewhat by state aid rules and the *de minimis* rules and all of that, but to modify an old boat for safety reasons can sometimes be a fruitless exercise. It could be a lot more profitable, going forward, to actually replace the whole boat and get a new rig as opposed to trying to make changes on an

ongoing basis to outdated equipment. I would like to see a scheme for fishermen and fisherwomen, similar to TAMS in the other agricultural sectors, where there would be grant aid available for upgrading their equipment.

I know the Minister of State has met the Commissioner on numerous occasions and I hope in the battle - it is a battle - that the Minister of State really goes hard on the third countries. The problem is our fishermen live by the book. They live by the rules that are set by Europe and they fish with biology and security in mind. They keep to the allowable catches. It is so frustrating, even for the likes of me watching from a distance, to see third country boats coming in and robbing our waters. They are decimating the stock for the future. It is not just about what they take out on any given day. It is the consequences of their actions going forward for the numbers that will be available for the people who are sticking to the rules. I do not know how the Minister of State can do it and it is a new Ministry but that will be one of the big tasks for him, going forward, to take control of the situation with what we call third countries.

That is enough of a wish list for the Minister of State. He has a battle on his hands but I know him of old. If I was in a bit of scrap, there is no one I would like better to have on my shoulder than Timmy Dooley so I have no doubt he will fight the good fight. It needs to be fought. The next Council will determine fishing in this country for a long time to come.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I understand Senators Kyne and Kennelly are sharing time.

Senator Seán Kyne: We are, if that is agreed.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Senator Seán Kyne: I thank the Minister of State for coming here in person. I acknowledge Senator Boyle and Senator O'Donovan for leading off on this Private Members' business about the fishing sector. I do not believe it is ever too late to discuss any of our native and primary industries. In some ways, it has been the poor relation of agriculture, no doubt, since we joined the EEC, which is now the European Union. That is not to say it does not have a future and does not need continued assessment and support.

I welcome the appointment of the Minister of State. It is very much an identifiable, stand-alone sector that deserves a Minister of State to deal with the issues. On a slight side note, I am a member of the defence and security committee and we were in Gormanston, County Meath last week to see the investment in facilities there and hear about recruitment into our Naval Service, which goes hand in hand with fisheries protection. There is a way to go but at least there is a positive trend in the recruitment of naval personnel, which will be important for protecting our waters.

The European Union has put its faith in the scientific advice about these things. In some ways, that has tied the hands of Ministers over the years, along with the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea. Advice is that and it also has to be advice that is sensible, implementable and agreeable. Rules and decisions that are made must be abided by all relevant participants. The concerns expressed in this motion regarding third nations is hugely important because there is a view that third nations, including Norway, have too much sway on our waters and the fish stocks. It is important to recognise that agreeing a motion like this today

strengthens the Minister of State's hand in terms of the work he has to do on behalf of the Department, the fishermen and the State. Therefore, the motion is important. I also acknowledge the investment that has taken place in ports across the country. There is always more to do, no more than on our road network or our schools. A pipeline of further development is always needed. I acknowledge, as I have done before, the work of the former Minister, Deputy McConalogue, and his work in Rossaveal, County Galway. You hear stories of hundreds employed in the past in places like Rossaveal in the fishing sector, and boatloads of fish coming ashore. That is not the reality now unfortunately. I acknowledge the work that has gone into this motion and look forward to the Minister of State's response on this and his plans going forward.

Senator Mike Kennelly: I speak in strong support of this motion. My fellow Fine Gael Senators Boyle and O'Donovan have been at the forefront since becoming Senators in protecting the livelihoods of fishing communities in counties Donegal and Cork. That has to be respected. This motion speaks directly to the livelihoods of all our coastal communities and the fishing villages that have sustained Ireland for generations. I acknowledge the appointment of Deputy Dooley as Minister of State with responsibility for fisheries and the marine. As stated already, this is a solid move. His recent announcements of funding for harbour developments and the FLAG coastal community schemes are welcome. These must be matched with stronger protections for our fishermen and fisherwomen who face urgent and complex challenges. In Kerry's beautiful coastal fishing villages and towns, from Dingle to Castlegregory, over to Portmagee, Cahersiveen, Valentia Island, Cromane and Fenit, fishing is more than a job. It keeps our local economies alive, carries on traditions and holds our communities together, but our fishing families are under real pressure. Quota cuts, higher fuels and running costs and tough international rules are making it harder than ever for them to survive. Government investment in our ports under the fishery harbour and coastal infrastructure development programme, from which I welcome the contribution of €470,000 for the Dingle pier, is welcome but vigilance is still required. We cannot ignore the irresponsible behaviour of third countries like Norway, which has been mentioned, that refuse to set total allowable catches in line with the ICES scientific advice nor can we accept the arrangement that grants disproportionate access to Irish waters while disregarding sustainability. This undermines not only our fishermen but the very principle of fair partnership within the EU. That is why this motion calls on the Government to invoke the Hague preferences at the appropriate time to oppose further concessions and to safeguard shore-based services, processing, storage and transport that will keep jobs and economic activity alive in our villages. It calls for investment and modernisation in safety measures for our fleet and for targeted supports to small-scale and inshore fishers who are the custodians of traditional fishing practices and the heart of our coastal identity. This is about more than quotas and negotiations. It is about protecting the dignity of the work and sustaining our beautiful communities where every catch supports a family and ensuring that Ireland's fishing villages from Donegal to Kerry remain vibrant for generations to come.

Senator Sarah O'Reilly: I endorse the motion and thank the Fine Gael Senators for bringing such an important motion to the floor of the Upper House. I also thank the Minister of State for attending. However, I fear the motion does not go far enough. I support the Sinn Féin motions as well. My amendment speaks to the concerns consistently raised by fishers regarding

the operational approach, transparency and consistency of enforcement by the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority. Fishermen across the country feel like they are standing on the deck of a sinking ship waiting for the industry they love to quietly disappear. Communities that thrived on fishing are now barely hanging on. I welcome the points raised in this motion, but it does not go far enough. It would be a disservice to every inshore and offshore fisherman if we fail to name one of the core issues staring them in the face. Those are the practices of the SFPA. This amendment simply recognises what the fishermen have been saying for years. There are serious concerns about the operational approach, transparency and consistency of enforcement by the authority. While the authority issues polished press releases proudly announcing the continued monitoring of inshore vessels to support conservation methods, inshore fishermen are fighting for a fairer quota just to survive. We support conservation efforts but we cannot see fishing communities themselves driven out of existence. The fishing community has no issue with regulations but the questionable practices of the SFPA are an issue. Recently a ten-year case was thrown out of court due to lack of evidence. The NSAI found that an officer of the SFPA allegedly tampered with evidence, which ultimately led to a wrong finding. After a ten-year legal battle, there was no comeback for that business or that family. We cannot keep ignoring the lived reality of fishermen who feel policed out of existence rather than supported. This amendment insists that their voices, frustrations and concerns be recognised in this House and acted upon. This amendment is crucial in ensuring fishing communities know that we hear their concerns and are willing to stand with them.

I will speak to amendment No. 5, to "review the governance, operational practices, and accountability structures of the [SFPA], and bring forward proposals to strengthen independent oversight and improve transparency and engagement with the fishing sector". If we are serious about securing the future of Irish fishing, we cannot continue pretending that all is well within the governance and accountability structures of the SFPA. I am saddened to say it, but the unwillingness to make the SFPA accountable is because the Minister and the Department do not want any culpability for their actions. With respect to the Minister of State, the previous Minister of agriculture, in particular, responded to criticism of the SFPA by throwing his hands up and saying it was an independent body and nothing to do with him. We had the chair of the SFPA before the fisheries committee last week and question after question put to him went unanswered. When I pressed him on whom he was accountable to, he said he was accountable to our committee. However, he answered no questions. It would have been laughable if it were not so serious. A regulator with enormous power over people's livelihoods should not be a law unto itself. I call on the Government to commit to a full review of the governance, operational practices and accountability of the SFPA and to bring forward concrete proposals to strengthen independent oversight and to improve transparency engagement with the sector. This amendment is about rebalancing the system, so fishers are treated with fairness, respect and transparency.

Senator Gareth Scahill: I welcome the Minister of State. I compliment my colleagues Senators Boyle and O'Donovan for leading on the motion. I will not, like Senator Paul Daly, say that I am on a coastline or anything like that. I am a County Roscommon man but I understand the impact of certain sectors on rural communities, and I do not believe it is too late to be making changes. Looking back, we can always think of a time when it might have been a better decision but the next best time is right now, and that is what this motion is leading to. I highlight that the seafood economy is worth in the region of €1.24 billion in terms of GDP.

Behind that headline are almost 17,000 men and women employed directly or indirectly in fishing, aquaculture, processing and the wider seafood chain. This is not a niche sector in our coastal communities. Bord Iascaigh Mhara's analysis shows that the seafood industry accounts for approximately 6% of all jobs in coastal areas, rising to as high as 14% in some of the most fishing dependent communities. In the main ports, over 8,700 jobs are supported and an estimated €736 million is generated for the economy each year. For many towns and villages, if fishing slows, everything slows. These are overwhelmingly indigenous family-owned businesses, local boat owners, small processors, ice plants, hauliers, engineers, net makers and co-ops that keep money circulating on the pier and on the high street. If those enterprises fail, there is no multinational waiting in the wings to replace them. What follows is out-migration, empty harbours and closed school gates. I acknowledge the Government's investment under the fishery harbour and coastal infrastructure development programme but for most indigenous fishing businesses the reality is that they are trying to survive with a squeeze from every direction. ICES scientific advice points towards quota reductions in key stocks. The costs of fuel, insurance and compliance are all climbing, as my colleagues have said. At the same time, international agreements have allowed third countries increased access to the waters around Ireland. We are particularly concerned where third countries, including Norway, seek quota shares and set total allowable catches that do not align with ICES advice. That is not responsible stewardship of shared stocks and it does not treat the EU or Ireland as an equal partner.

I acknowledge that I am sharing time with Senator Cathal Byrne but I will just say that protecting Ireland's indigenous fishing businesses is about much more than defending our coastal interests. It is about keeping coastal communities alive, sustaining local enterprise and ensuring that the wealth of our seas translates into real lasting security for the people who have depended on it for generations.

Senator Cathal Byrne: I support the motion put forward by my colleagues this evening. I recognise the contribution of the proposer of the motion, Senator Manus Boyle, who is the Fine Gael spokesperson on fisheries, in this area and the work that has been done by my colleague, Senator Noel O'Donovan. Wexford is a very proud fishing county with a strong tradition of fishing, particularly in south Wexford, where we have the iconic Kilmore Quay, an area I recently had the opportunity to visit when I attended a mass commemorating those from County Wexford who were lost at sea. This motion makes a number of straightforward common-sense proposals. I urge the Minister of State to do his very best to make sure that each one of the commitments put forward in the motion is recognised and brought forward. The reality is that, for too long, our fishermen have felt their voice is not being heard at the top levels. That has to change. On behalf of fishermen in County Wexford, I urge the Minister of State to do his absolute best to make sure that voice is heard not just at Government level in this country, but in Brussels, in Europe and at the highest tables in the EU.

It is very important that our natural resources at sea are recognised for what they are, an Irish asset that cannot be abused by overseas trawlers from foreign waters coming into our waters and depleting assets that should be the inheritance of the next generation of fishermen here in this country. As with farming, if the next generation of fishermen and fisherwomen do not see this as a vital and crucial source of income, the industry will simply not exist. The industry is under the Minister of State's stewardship and I implore him to ensure sustainable measures are

put in place now so that the next generation can take this up and so that the next generation in Kilmore Quay and other harbours across the country see it as a viable source of income.

Senator Mark Duffy: I thank the Minister of State for being here this evening for this very important discussion on supporting the fishing industry, which is holding on by a thread in certain communities. I compliment Senators Manus Boyle and Noel O'Donovan, who have done great work in representing fishermen and fisherwomen and coastal communities right across the country, for their leadership on this issue.

With regard to my home county of Mayo, I will specifically raise the issue of the hook and line-caught mackerel quota, which is affecting many families and the industry in the coastal communities of County Mayo. It is the same in every community. It is multigenerational. There is history, heritage and a huge depth of knowledge of the waters, of the industry and of the practice. The hook and line-caught mackerel quota is only 1% of the overall quota Ireland has got from the EU. That 1% is shared out among 1,500 vessels while the remaining 99% of the quota is shared among 50 vessels. The fishermen I have spoken to are totally aggrieved by this. They are pleading the case for this quota to be increased in whatever way it can be. If they do not use the quota, they are happy for it to be returned. I understand there are complexities.

I really welcome this motion as a demonstration that the House is strong in its support for the fishing industry right across the country. Let us project that support to our European counterparts on a united basis. We need to be very strong on it. We need to fight for multigenerational families who feel left out and aggrieved by the issues that have been mentioned. Article 17 of the Common Fisheries Policy regulation states that quotas should be shared out on a sustainable basis. In fairness, the hook-and-line fishermen are sustainable in their practices. This is a lifeline for families and for rural communities. There is a great depth of history to it. It needs help and support. An increased quota for these fishermen in Erris and right across the coast of County Mayo would result in a marked improvement in their livelihoods and for the successive generations that rely on this income.

I thank the Minister of State for his work on this. I also thank my colleagues across the House who have advocated very strongly on this pressing issue and the need to support the industry. As I have said, we need a united voice from the House so that we can fight the case internationally on behalf of families and communities right across the island.

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Timmy Dooley): I thank the proposers, Senators Manus Boyle and Noel O'Donovan, the Fine Gael Senators who put together this comprehensive motion, and the other Senators who have contributed in a very collegiate and supportive way. I have spent a considerable amount of time in this House and I am constantly reminded that it does business in a very different way from how business may be done elsewhere. It is good to be part of that again.

Senator Noel O'Donovan: Welcome back.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: I am glad to be back in this position. When I look around and see all of these competitive faces, I think I might struggle to survive an electoral contest with many

of them. I am very appreciative of the time and the opportunity afforded to me to speak to Senators today. I welcome this motion, which is timely in light of the work the Department, the Government and I are doing in trying to get through a very difficult time.

I will commence by speaking a little bit on fisheries negotiations from an Irish perspective in the European context. I am Minister of State with special responsibility for fisheries. A number of Senators have welcomed the decision not so much to appoint me, but to establish that role. I am trying to work with others to the greatest extent possible to make that role meaningful. One of my key roles is that I manage the fishing opportunities for Ireland in the context of the quota species covered by the Common Fisheries Policy. As many of the Senators will be aware, the EU utilises the scientific advice provided by the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas, ICES - when I first saw that term, I had to check it because it has a different meaning in other contexts - to determine the relevant total allowable catches across the various different species. Most total allowable catches and quotas relevant to Ireland are set on foot of the formal negotiations between the EU and UK, because we share many stocks; separate negotiations between the EU, Norway and the UK; negotiations between the EU and Norway; and the coastal state negotiations, which involve the EU, UK, Norway, Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland. A complex multiplicity of bilateral negotiations take place. Where Ireland is involved, the EU negotiates on our behalf, whether in the coastal states environment, which involves a number of third countries, or directly with the UK. As the conservation of marine biological resources under the Common Fisheries Policy is a Union competence, the European Commission has exclusive competence to negotiate on the EU's behalf on fisheries with third countries which have been identified. I recognise and will reflect on what many Senators have said about the activities of third countries. Ireland will continue to be active in raising the real and legitimate concerns that Ireland has on the outcomes in this particular area.

The issue of unsustainable fishing was a common theme for many Senators. The overfishing of key pelagic stocks, such as mackerel, by certain coastal states outside the EU has been raised by Ireland repeatedly over recent years. ICES assesses that the total spawning stock biomass of mackerel has decreased from about 6 million tonnes in 2021 to 2.7 million tonnes in 2025. That is a very clear indication that this overfishing has had a detrimental impact on the fish stocks, in the first instance. That has a significant knock-on effect on coastal communities. With the reductions in quota, it is very clear that the catching of fish, which is integral to those communities in terms of the processing and various activities that take place around that, and the supply chain into the fishing sector are dramatically impacted.

As the largest holder of EU quota for mackerel in the western waters area - the waters off the coast of Ireland - the devastating impact of the decline in this stock is significantly and acutely felt by Ireland. I have been consistently raising this issue with European colleagues since I took on this role. At last month's AGRIFISH meeting, I brought a discussion item to the agenda which was supported by 12 member states. I called for "urgent EU action to save the North East Atlantic pelagic Stocks". I also called for the EU to send a clear message that actions which threaten the sustainability of our shared stocks are not acceptable to the EU. Ireland asserts that a strong and common European position that is in the best interests of all fishing parties should be adopted. It is critical to ensure that these stocks are fished in a sustainable manner and that comprehensive agreements, which protect the EU's quota share and subsequently Ireland's quota share, can be reached to govern fishing opportunities for the coming year.

Although there is shared concern among member states about the impact of third country actions, particularly those of Norway, in respect of the pelagic stocks, the same member states are also anxious to conclude bilateral EU fisheries negotiations with Norway in respect of other species which, in some cases, provide greater opportunities for them and are of greater significance. For example, access to Norwegian waters for arctic cod is of importance to certain member states and is covered by the EU-Norway agreement. Additionally, two access agreements of importance to the North Sea member states are also involved. Commercial fishing operations with interests in a number of member states and beyond also want the agreement to facilitate their fishing interests. Consequently Ireland is, on occasion, isolated in EU co-ordination meetings when calling for strong measures. I think many Senators are aware of understand and know this fact. I have remained resolute in the face of consistent political pressure. I have set a policy mandate that Ireland does not to agree to any access or quota transfer for blue whiting in the context of the EU-Norway discussions. I do so from a principled position that we cannot be seen in any sense to reward in any way the behaviour these coastal states have engaged in. At a time when the scientific advice is recommending a cut of 70%, if that is not a trigger point, then what is?

While I am getting positive soundings for what we are saying, I am conscious that other member states have their own stocks that they want to get agreement on. For that reason, it is a balancing game. We remain engaged with member states and with the Commission. Before I came down from my office I had another conversation with the Commissioner and other member states. We are trying to arrange meetings over the coming weeks with all member states to set out very clearly how devastating the impact of Brexit has been for us. I do not need to remind Senators that there is a proposed 70% cut in mackerel this year. That is a really important stock. We took a 20% cut last year, on scientific advice, and Brexit introduced a cut of 26%. When we look at all of that together, we can see the devastating impact it has had.

Certain member states are at pains to remind Ireland that the Irish EEZ is considered EU waters under the CFP. I challenge them to consider how they would feel if third country fishing boats were given access to their waters despite their national position. That argument is gaining some traction with the Commission. There is a desire to say we are in this together. We have to try to get a consensus rather than rolling a country, which they can do under the qualified majority. We do not have an absolute veto any more, of course. We must try to do this in a collegiate way that looks to the future and to the conservation efforts needed to try to rebuild the stocks.

I will turn to the worrying position for 2026 and what the ICES advice is telling us. In September and October, the 2026 ICES report published deeply concerning advice for stocks of significant interest to Ireland. I have already mentioned mackerel, but blue whiting, boarfish and nephrops are in there as well. I am not a fisherman, so for a while so it was a challenge for me to contend with some of the terminology in this sector. I understand now that the term "nephrops" covers species like prawns and langoustines, which we get infrequently in County Clare. We enjoy them when we get them. The scale of these reductions has caused grave concerns for the seafood sector and for people in the coastal communities the Senators and I represent, which are economically dependent on it. As many Senators said in their contributions, these businesses, along with the other parts of the supply chain that many of them mentioned, keep fishing towns going. I refer to shops, fuel merchants, net menders, etc. These are all parts of the ecosystem of coastal communities. It is not as if there are lots of

alternatives that can be swapped into these communities. They have been built around this industry. Therefore, there is an onus on all of us to find a way through this very difficult time.

These negotiations have not concluded yet, so the final numbers for quotas are unknown. An analysis by BIM, based on the scientific advice and on last year's average pricing for fish stocks, indicates a reduction of approximately €75.5 million. I need to qualify that this is overall first sale value across the Irish fleet. Reductions of approximately 47% for pelagic, 10% for demersal or whitefish, and 20% for shellfish in the nephrops space are envisaged. That is just the value of the fish when they are landed and sold. There are other losses as well in terms of what the processing sector will lose and what the continued onward sale of that will mean to other operators and wholesalers, etc. If we do not have the raw material, we cannot get the added value. While €75 million is the quantifiable number, the economic impact will be significantly greater than that. These values do not account for the economic impact along the whole value chain, particularly for fish processors and ancillary services, as I have mentioned. Members of this value chain, particularly in the processing sector for pelagic species, have expressed significant concern as to the viability of their businesses without the supply of raw material direct from Irish vessels. Lower supply means higher prices and consequently means having to compete throughout Europe for raw materials, so that is a further challenge. I have asked BIM to conduct an analysis on the multiplier effect of these reductions across the seafood sector. Working with the Minister, Deputy Heydon, a further memo to the Government will be brought forward when the full implications of the 2026 fishing opportunities are known. Two weeks ago, we drafted a memo which the Minister, Deputy Heydon, as the senior Minister, brought to the Government. It set out in the first instance a notification outlining that €75.5 million, but also setting out for the Government a very clear picture of the challenges faced. Senator Kyne had the privilege of sitting at the Cabinet so he knows how this works. When you come from the Department, you flag to your colleagues the concerns and then you look at how to manage that into the future.

Moving on from international negotiations, I would like to update Senators on how fishing opportunities are allocated between member states. A number of Senators spoke about how we might get more quota or a reallocation. The aim of the CFP is to allocate fishing opportunities internally among member states in such a way as to ensure the relative stability of the fishing activities of each member state for each fish stock or fishery. This is provided for in Article 16 of the CFP regulation and is further explained in some recitals of the CFP regulation. I think it is explained in recitals 35 to 37. For each stock a different allocation percentage per EU country, known as the relative stability key, is applied for the sharing out of the quotas. The share allocation of stocks between member states was established as a principle of the CFP in 1983. I do not want to indicate to anybody that I will be able to change what was enshrined back then. It was based on the average catch of each member state over a period of reference years, which is referred to as the "track record". There is no doubt our fleet was underdeveloped at that stage. It would not be fair for me to say that previous Ministers failed when they were unable to overturn what had happened. The reality is that our quotas, or our percentage of them, were based on what our fishing industry was at the time. Due to the work of some great innovators, particularly around the Killybegs area, we have developed that fleet in the intervening years. They have developed new fisheries. That has been what has assisted us in growing to some extent.

People often ask how we can change the relative stability key, or the percentage of the quota that is shared out, in order that Ireland can get more of the EU quota in percentage terms? This is a reasonable question in light of the level of fishing activity by other member states in our EEZ. However, I have to clarify to the House that any change to the existing system of quota allocations would require a majority of member states to agree under the qualified majority voting system. This would require other member states to give up their existing quota shares. Any change to relative stability would involve a loss for some other member states and therefore poses particular challenges in a qualified majority voting context. I say that to explain to Members the context in which any changes would come about. That is while the CFP remains as it is currently. The only exception to this relates to what are known as the Hague preferences, which are based on a special recognition agreement of the underdeveloped nature of the Irish fleet and the heavy control responsibility on us when Ireland joined the EU. The Hague preferences are quantities of fish that Ireland and previously the UK can invoke under certain circumstances. If Ireland does not achieve quotas greater than these trigger figures, they may invoke the Hague preferences. These additional fishing opportunities, traditionally referred to as the Hague preferences, have been allocated to Ireland each year since the late 1980s. This effectively means that quota from other member states is allocated from their share to Ireland. I have been fully forthright with other member states, and I signalled quite clearly at the November AGRIFISH Council meeting, that on full analysis of the finalised quota figures in the draft regulation to be presented at the December AGRIFISH Council meeting, we will invoke the relevant Hague preferences for 2026.

What makes it more contentious now than ever is that last year was the first year that the quota from an Irish perspective went below that trigger point for mackerel. It was there and it was used for other pelagic stocks in the past, but last year was the first time we invoked the Hague preferences, much to the annoyance of a number of member states which heretofore were not impacted as negatively as they feel they were on that occasion. For that reason they are actively attempting to undermine it. We have made it very clear that this is a red-line issue for us and that the Hague preferences as enshrined in the CFP, albeit in the recitals, are a fundamental component of the policy and we will defend them vigorously. BIM modelling shows that invoking the Hague preferences across the relevant stocks would increase Irish quota by approximately 7,300 tonnes and raise landed value by just over €13 million. That €13 million is very important. In other sectors, €13 million might not be considered a major number but when one sees the implications for that across coastal communities, it is very significant. This is really important. I note that this would only go a small way towards making up for the overall loss, estimated at over €75 million, arising from the scientific advice. I have explained what that €75 million means and what it does not include.

It is important to note that the Hague preferences are not set out in the Commission's TACs or in the quota regulation proposal, and must be agreed by the Council. As I said, a number of impacted member states are actively campaigning against us but I am confident, based on the reference in the recitals of the CFP, that they can be deployed and accepted by other member states. Let me assure this House that I will not be found wanting in battling for Ireland's Hague preferences to be secured. I am in ongoing contact with the Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans, Costas Kadis, on these matters of huge importance to Ireland, in addition to the political leaders with responsibility for fisheries across the EU member states. Similarly, my

officials in Brussels and at home are working diligently to progress with mandate we have provided them with.

As Senators noted, the programme for Government recognises the valuable "role of fisheries in the future of our country and the communities that rely on this activity for their livelihood". Furthermore, it notes the commitment of this Government to "Defend Irish fishing interests" in the context of fisheries negotiations between the EU and third countries. Ireland's seafood development programme, which is funded by the Government and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund 2021-2027, is the primary funding programme for the seafood sector. Specific supports to individual inshore fishermen include the small-scale coastal fisheries, sustainable fisheries, V-notching and seafood training schemes. Financial supports are also available to inshore fishermen and women to support economic diversification under the FLAG schemes, which were mentioned by a number of Senators. If the Leas-Chathaoirleach will give me a small bit of latitude, I will conclude shortly. I want to work further with inshore fishermen, to whom financial supports are available. I have reached an agreement in the last day which I have shared with the producer organisations for the inshore fishermen. We have found a way to provide upfront payments to them, rather than them having to spend their own money and applying for it later. This is something they had asked for. I am committed in trying to assist them in every way I can. An additional Exchequer-funded fleet safety scheme is also available to inshore fishermen and fisherwomen to improve safety on vessels.

In March of this year, I announced an allocation of over €27 million to the Department's 2025 fishery harbour and coastal infrastructure development programme. This comprises an investment package of €23.4 million for the six fisheries harbours and €4.3 million to assist local authorities in carrying out small-scale projects for the development and repair of piers, harbours and slipways in their ownership. I will endeavour to continue this investment as public finances and annual budgets allow.

I welcome this timely motion proposed by Senators. I can confirm that the Government can accept amendments Nos. 1, 2 and 3. I think amendments Nos. 2 and 3 are yet to be moved but if they are moved, we will certainly accept them. These amendments have been submitted by Senators Collins, Conor Murphy, McCormack, Tully, Nicole Ryan and Andrews of Sinn Féin. However, the Government cannot accept amendments Nos. 4 and 5, as submitted by Senators Sarah O'Reilly, Mullen and Keogan, as I am advised that they are unnecessarily prejudicial to a legitimate control and enforcement agency of the State. I am sorry I have to do that. Senator Sarah O'Reilly is a very strong contributor at the committee and has shown a great passion and understanding of the fishing sector. I want to thank her for her ongoing work on this. I am sorry that I have to disappoint in this regard but I know where she is coming from. I saw some of the footage from that committee. I understand that from time to time it is difficult for officials to go before a committee. One could almost do a comparison with bringing the gardaí into a committee to ask them about certain investigations or how they do their business. That might provoke a certain response. I have the capacity to talk to the SFPA. I will have a conversation with it about how it might engage in as full a way as it can with the committee - recognising the constraints it is under, what the law provides and how it has to protect its role - and try to engage in as proactive a way as possible because the committee is ultimately the oversight for the SFPA. I know it is difficult because it cannot get into individual cases but there has to be a better way to talk about the generality of the issues that arise.

6 o'clock

While I do not have the capacity to direct the SFPA in that regard, I will offer comforting words, if they are of benefit, to ask for an engagement that will hopefully meet the needs and expectations, but I say that without prejudice, recognising the independent role of the SFPA.

I agree with many of the speakers that the proposed quota cuts present real and significant challenges to the viability of our fleet and the ancillary services that support the seafood sector in rural communities. As I stated, a detailed economic assessment of the impact on the fishing communities will be undertaken by Bord Iascaigh Mhara, BIM. This will include the impact on areas across the fleet. As Minister of State, I have committed to working closely across government to assess what supports may be available to the sector in the context of state aid rules and future available funds. I have had very good engagement from the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste. I know Senator Boyle had numerous conversations with the Tánaiste when he was Minister for foreign affairs. He is now Minister for Finance, so we hope some of those comforting tones that he provided will transfer into financial supports. He has been in touch with me. I know he is committed to the sector. Collectively, we can move it forward. Further, the Minister, Deputy Heydon, brought that memorandum to the Government and we will continue to update colleagues on that. I thank Senators. I thank the Acting Chair-----

Acting Chairperson (Senator Garret Kelleher): The Minister of State is very welcome. I promised some latitude.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: -----for giving me a little latitude and flexibility. I think it was important because of the real engagement that we all had this evening and the fact that it is being done in a collegiate way. The normal battle lines seem to have been put aside for the moment, although I am sure they will be back on another occasion when they will be slightly different. I do not know whether it is permissible, but maybe we could recognise a former colleague of mine, the former Senator Coffey, who was with us in the Seanad, went on to greater things and has now gone on to much greater things. He has proven to all of us that there is life after politics, so we recognise his presence too and thank him for that.

Acting Chairperson (Senator Garret Kelleher): I welcome the former Senator, TD and Minister Paudie Coffey, Paul Fox and Belén Martí from Edwards Lifesciences. They are all very welcome to the Chamber. I hope they enjoy their visit to Leinster House.

Senator Manus Boyle: I thank the Minister of State for coming in. I thank all my fellow Senators, cross-party. When the Minister of State is going to Europe, he knows there is one united voice behind the fishing industry in Ireland. It is important that we get a deal for our fishermen. For far too long, as a fellow Senator said, we have been the poor relation at the table. It is time that we got a good deal for Ireland and stood up for our people.

A fellow Senator said it is a bit too late. Maybe it is. I do not know. I started on his journey four years ago when we were sitting in a canteen and a couple of my men asked me what I was going to do about it, because nobody was doing anything. We were loading a freezer boat that day and I was asking myself what we could do. I met my father on the pier and said to him that the boys were in bad humour because nothing was being done. Senator Blaney knows him

well. He said to me, "Manus, one thing you have to do is stand up for things that you think are wrong." That evening, I decided to call a meeting in Killybegs. That was a Thursday evening. On a Saturday afternoon at 3 o'clock, we had more than 300 people in the Tara Hotel. I wanted to take a stand for what is right. The fishing industry has been decimated for years upon years. Nobody cared.

When I first came to this House four years ago, it was very hard to even get a meeting. In fairness to the then Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, he was the only one who opened the door. I spent weeks coming here, along with fish processors and everything, trying to get meetings, but in fairness to him, he took a lead on it. I must credit the now Tánaiste, Simon Harris. Since the minute he rang me, he has given me 100% support for the fishing industry. We need that. We really do, because we got so many bad deals over the years.

As the Minister of State said, Brexit introduced a cut of 26%. It beggars belief how we could give away so much to other countries. The nearest only gives 6%. Ireland was done over with that. We all heard in Killybegs at that time that we should not worry about it because burden-sharing was coming and it would be sorted. It was never sorted. We are only feeling it now in our ports. Standing on the pier, you see the boats tied to the pier, and every other nation is fishing. It is hard for the Irish people to look at the ship automatic identification system, SIS, and see that there are Belgians, French, Spanish and Dutch off the Irish coast, fishing away, yet our boats are tied to the pier. Our coastal communities are decimated by it. We can talk to the inshore fishermen. They are feeling the pain. So are the island fishermen, who are getting cut too. They really need support. I cannot understand how the EEC can let Norway come in and fish in exclusive economic zone waters, as the Minister of State said, without a contribution to Ireland. We got a deal a couple of years ago where we let them in for 150,000 tonnes and Ireland got 10,000 tonnes. I do not know who is doing the maths but there was a bad deal. That needs to be stopped.

The Minister of State, since the moment I met him, has said he would stand up for it and he is standing up, as is the whole Government, but we really need everybody to stand up. There are 17,000 jobs in the fishing industry. If we lost 17,000 jobs anywhere, it would leave an enormous hole. As the Minister of State said, the service industry has grown up around these places, in Killybegs, Castletown and Howth. They are all part of the industry, including net makers, engineering companies, hydraulic companies and boat builders. They all employ people. Those people's jobs will be in jeopardy. If they go, our communities will be decimated. In the eighties, Killybegs had a football team and it was top of the division. Now, we are struggling to get a team. We have a good team, in fairness, but compared with the eighties, when we were winning all around us, it is a big difference. You see the difference, even in the school numbers, because people are leaving. They are going to offshore wind farms and to Australia. They really have to because you cannot stay around.

At one time, the fishing industry would work in Killybegs from September to May. Now you are lucky if you get a month's work out of it. It is devastating for coastal communities. The Minister of State talked about the Tánaiste. We need to be looking down the road of Government supports if things go very wrong. It is the last thing any fisherman wants to hear or see. All we want is fish. We are happy if we get the quota and can fish away, but the Government has to look at supports down the line.

Finally, I wonder how to put this nicely. We really need to strengthen our hand in Brussels. It is one of the most important things. My colleague Senator O'Donovan was with me last time. It is important that we get a strong team there.

Acting Chairperson (Senator Garret Kelleher): I welcome our colleague Senator Aubrey McCarthy, who is here with the board members of Tiglin, a homelessness and addiction charity that does fantastic work. Tá fáilte romhaibh ar fad.

Amendment agreed to.

Senator Joanne Collins: I move amendment No. 2:

In the fifth paragraph under “calls on the Government to:”, to delete “small-scale and inshore fishers” and substitute “small-scale, inshore and island fisher-men and women”;

Senator Nicole Ryan: I second the amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Senator Joanne Collins: I move amendment No. 3:

To delete the fourth paragraph under “That Seanad Éireann:” and substitute the following:

- “notes the investment by Government in some ports, harbours and piers, under the Fisheries Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Development Programme and the Brexit Adjustment Reserve Fund;”

Senator Nicole Ryan: I second the amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Senator Sarah O'Reilly: I move amendment No. 4:

After the the last paragraph under “That Seanad Éireann:”, to insert the following paragraph:

- “the concerns consistently raised by fishers regarding the operational approach, transparency and consistency of enforcement by the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority;”

Senator Sharon Keogan: I second the amendment.

Amendment put:

The Seanad divided: Tá, 13; Níl, 28.	
Tá	Níl
Andrews, Chris.	Blaney, Niall.
Boyhan, Victor.	Boyle, Manus.
Collins, Joanne.	Brady, Paraic.
Conway, Joe.	Byrne, Cathal.
Cosgrove, Nessa.	Byrne, Maria.
Keogan, Sharon.	Casey, Pat.

McCarthy, Aubrey.	Comyn, Alison.
McCormack, Maria.	Conway, Martin.
Murphy, Conor.	Costello, Teresa.
O'Reilly, Sarah.	Crowe, Ollie.
Ryan, Nicole.	Daly, Paul.
Stephenson, Patricia.	Davitt, Aidan.
Tully, Pauline.	Duffy, Mark.
	Fitzpatrick, Mary.
	Goldsboro, Imelda.
	Kelleher, Garret.
	Kennelly, Mike.
	Kyne, Seán.
	Lynch, Eileen.
	Murphy, P. J.
	Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.
	Nelson Murray, Linda.
	Ní Chuilinn, Evanne.
	O'Donovan, Noel.
	O'Loughlin, Fiona.
	Rabbitte, Anne.
	Ryan, Dee.
	Scahill, Gareth.

Tellers: Tá, Senators Sarah O'Reilly and Sharon Keogan; Níl, Senators Cathal Byrne and Paul Daly.

Amendment declared lost.

Senator oirleach: I welcome to the Distinguished Visitors Gallery the Bolton Street class of 1991 to 1994. If Members want to know any secrets from my days in college, they are the people to ask. Thankfully, there was no social media back then so absolutely nothing happened and everything is a rumour and hearsay. They will be in the bar later and if Members want to hear about my time as the class representative, and there was some issue about calculators, though I cannot remember the details, they will tell them all about it.

Senator Sarah O'Reilly: I move amendment No. 5:

After the last paragraph under “calls on the Government to:”, to insert the following paragraph:

- “review the governance, operational practices, and accountability structures of the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority, and bring forward proposals to strengthen independent oversight and improve transparency and engagement with the fishing sector.”

Senator Sharon Keogan: I second the amendment.

Amendment put:

The Seanad divided: Tá, 13; Níl, 29.

Tá	Níl
Andrews, Chris.	Blaney, Niall.
Boyhan, Victor.	Boyle, Manus.
Collins, Joanne.	Brady, Paraic.
Conway, Joe.	Byrne, Cathal.
Cosgrove, Nessa.	Byrne, Maria.
Keogan, Sharon.	Casey, Pat.
McCarthy, Aubrey.	Comyn, Alison.
McCormack, Maria.	Conway, Martin.
Murphy, Conor.	Costello, Teresa.
O'Reilly, Sarah.	Crowe, Ollie.
Ryan, Nicole.	Daly, Paul.
Stephenson, Patricia.	Davitt, Aidan.
Tully, Pauline.	Duffy, Mark.
	Fitzpatrick, Mary.
	Goldsboro, Imelda.
	Kelleher, Garret.
	Kennelly, Mike.
	Kyne, Seán.
	Lynch, Eileen.
	Murphy, P. J.
	Murphy O'Mahony, Margaret.
	Nelson Murray, Linda.
	Ní Chuilinn, Evanne.
	O'Donovan, Noel.
	O'Loughlin, Fiona.
	O'Reilly, Joe.
	Rabbitte, Anne.
	Ryan, Dee.
	Scahill, Gareth.

Tellers: Tá, Senators Sarah O'Reilly and Sharon Keogan; Níl, Senators Cathal Byrne and Paul Daly.

Amendment declared lost.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

An Cathaoirleach: When is it proposed to sit again?

Senator Seán Kyne: Tomorrow morning at 9.30.

Cuireadh an Seanad ar athló ar 6.32 p.m. go dtí 9.30 a.m., Déardaoin, an 27 Samhain 2025.

The Seanad adjourned at 6.32 p.m. until 9.30 a.m. on Thursday, 20 November 2025.