

## Written Answers.

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**The following are questions tabled by Members for written response and the ministerial replies as received on the day from the Departments [unrevised].**

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*Questions Nos. 1 to 10, inclusive, answered orally.*

*Questions Nos. 11 to 43, inclusive, resubmitted.*

*Questions Nos. 44 to 46, inclusive, answered orally.*

### Beef Industry

47. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the price of cattle nationally will be addressed (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28551/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As the Deputy will be aware, as Minister for Agriculture, I have no role in determining prices for any commodity nor can I intervene in the same.

The Beef Sector is an important element of the Irish economy and I am conscious of the importance that this key sector plays in rural Ireland.

I am keenly aware that the past few months have been very challenging for beef farmers in particular, following a difficult year for farm incomes in 2018 due to weather conditions. There was a prolonged and exceptional period of depressed prices lasting from autumn 2018 to spring 2019, with the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the outcome of Brexit, among other factors, contributing to this market disturbance.

The recent announcement by Commissioner Hogan of EU exceptional aid for the Irish beef sector is very welcome in this context. I have been making the case for some time for an exceptional aid package from the EU Commission for Irish beef farmers, at EU Council of Agriculture Minister meetings, and in direct consultation with the Commission.

Further details on the aid package will be announced in due course following the appropriate stakeholder consultation.

The Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) is currently the main support specifically targeted for the suckler sector, which provides Irish beef farmers with some €300 million in funding over the current RDP period. Building on this is the exchequer-funded Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot (BEEP), a €20 million pilot project for 2019.

My Department has rolled out a range of schemes as part of the €4 billion Rural Development Programme (RDP), 2014 - 2020. In addition to the BDGP, other supports which are available for suckler farmers under Pillar II of the CAP include GLAS, ANCs and Knowledge Transfer Groups. Suckler farmers also benefit from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and

## Greening payments under CAP Pillar I.

My Department is examining all appropriate measures to support the different agrifood sectors, including the suckler sector in preparation for the next iteration of the CAP, and through the next Agri Food strategy to 2030. This includes opening new opportunities for the sale of Irish beef on international markets and, in recent years, Irish beef has gained access to the US, Japanese, Chinese and other markets. I have also provided additional resources to Bord Bia to promote beef in new and more traditional markets.

My view is that such measures should support and encourage suckler farmers to make the best decisions possible to improve the profitability and the economic and environmental efficiency of their farming system.

*Questions Nos. 48 to 53, inclusive, answered orally.*

## **Agrifood Sector**

54. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he continues to press for new markets for the agrifood sector with emphasis on replacements for those to be lost through Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28234/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The pursuit and development of new markets for Irish agri-food exports is a constant and central component of the strategic development of the industry, as evidenced by its placement at the heart of Food Wise 2025. It is particularly important given the need to diversify our markets and reduce our reliance on traditional destinations such as the UK.

Against the backdrop of EU-agreed trade deals such as those completed with Canada, Japan and Mexico, my Department continues its efforts to open new markets while further deepening trade with existing markets for Irish agri-food exporters.

For example, in 2018, it facilitated the decision of the Chinese authorities to open their market to Irish beef imports by listing a number of approved Irish beef establishments. Other notable achievements during 2018 were agreements with Qatar and Kuwait, which allowed for the importation of Irish beef, sheepmeat and poultry to their markets.

In April 2019, we saw the opening of the Ukrainian market for Irish beef and pork. During my June trade mission to Japan, an agreement was reached in principle to allow access for Irish Sheepmeat. This development followed the announcement last month of the removal of the under-30 months restriction for Irish beef exports to Japan. This means that all Irish beef is now eligible for export to this very valuable market.

Trade Missions play an important role in this work. In 2018, I led successful missions to the US, Canada, China, Indonesia and Malaysia, and an extensive trade mission itinerary is also being pursued in 2019. In March, Turkey was visited, primarily focusing on Live Trade. In May, I visited China. This was quickly followed with an extensive mission to Japan and South Korea in June. My next scheduled mission is to Algeria and Egypt in November.

Overall, agri-food exports to countries outside the EU have increased from around €2.7 billion to €3.6 billion in the period 2014 to 2018. This represents very rapid growth of 36% in that four-year timeframe.

*Questions Nos. 55 to 57, inclusive, answered orally.*

### **Climate Change Adaptation Plans**

58. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his priorities under the recently published Climate Action Plan 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28263/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The All-of-Government Plan to tackle climate breakdown sets out a series of step-up measures and underpinning actions and proposed targets for all sectors including the agriculture, forestry and land use sector.

The plan identifies 34 actions for the agriculture sector that will contribute to our transition to a low carbon economy and society across abatement measures, which reduce our emissions, carbon sequestration measures which is carbon removal and displacement of fossil fuels and reflects our three pillar policy approach to achieving carbon neutrality without comprising sustainable food production. Not alone are our sustainability ambitions driven by regulatory compliance but also by market demand with today's consumer seeking confirmation of our sustainability credentials.

To achieve the challenging target for the sector as set out in this plan will require immediate action through early adoption and high levels of take-up of the actions identified across our 139,000 plus family farms.

I see three important actions that can be advanced immediately.

- Deepening engagement with farmers and other stakeholders along the food supply chain to promote the necessary deployment of new technologies and improvement in farming practices;

- Improving nitrogen use efficiency such as widespread adoption of low emissions slurry spreading, introduction of clover in grassland swards and more efficient use of fertilisers; and

- Continuing our support for research and innovation such as animal breeding, improved grassland and fertiliser management and examining the potential of novel feed additives in grass based production systems.

Ongoing negotiations on the future of the next Common Agricultural Policy will ensure that our ambition in this area is aligned with European and national policy while also recognising the importance of a sustainable and viable agricultural sector to rural communities.

I will continue to work with my colleagues across Government to ensure successful implementation of the plan. I am also confident that the agriculture sector as a whole will contribute significantly to Ireland's transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy and society with collaboration, co-operation and collective responsibility being key in achieving this ambition and realising the potential of pro-active engagement.

*Question No. 59 answered orally.*

### **Agrifood Sector**

60. **Deputy Thomas Byrne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the

contingencies being operationalised and supports that will be in place to safeguard farmers and the agrifood sector here for all scenarios including a no-deal hard Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28255/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I have introduced a number of supports to assist the agri-food sector in preparing to address the challenges posed by Brexit. These include:

- the €300 million Brexit Loan Scheme for Brexit-impacted SMEs and mid-cap businesses. The funding arrangements ensure that at least 40% of the fund is available to food businesses. Up to 14 June 2019, 585 applications have been approved. The total number of loans progressed to sanction at bank level is 141, with a total value of €30.6m, of which 29, with a value of €8.2m, relate to food businesses;

- a market prioritisation exercise undertaken by Bord Bia to identify priority markets across all food and drinks categories;

- tailored supports and analysis are being provided to food companies through Bord Bia's Brexit Barometer;

- an intensified series of trade missions to develop and grow new markets;

- the recently launched DBEI/DAFM "Future Growth Loan Scheme" will bring up to €300 million of long-term strategic investment loans available to eligible Irish businesses, including farmers and the agri-food & seafood sectors. The fund is leveraged by Exchequer funding of €62 million, of which 40%, or some €25 million, has been provided by my Department. Businesses have been able to apply for loan eligibility through the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) since 17th April 2019.

I also have had ongoing discussions with Commissioner Hogan regarding the potential impact of a disorderly Brexit. The Commission have already made €50m available to Irish beef farmers as a response to market pressures, and this can be matched by national funding. I expect to be rolling out a support scheme with this funding in the very near future. I have also stressed the need for the Commission to be ready to deploy a further range of measures to mitigate the potential impacts on the agri-food and fisheries sector. Avoiding a no-deal Brexit continues to be the Government's overriding policy priority.

And, of course, our practical preparations for all potential scenarios, including a no-deal Brexit, continue to be progressed and refined through the whole-of-Government coordination structures that have been in place for some time.

*Question No. 61 answered orally.*

*Question No. 62 answered with Question No. 49.*

## **Agriculture Industry**

63. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he can expect to achieve carbon reduction targets while maintaining agricultural output having particular regard to the fact that the agricultural sector nationally is much more carbon efficient than in most other countries; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28235/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** While Ire-

land has what is internationally recognised as one of the most carbon efficient systems of food production in the EU, there are inherent challenges in reducing emissions in the sector. However, while agriculture is contributing to emissions, it is also part of the solution. The Teagasc Sustainability Survey shows that the top performing third of farms emitted, on average, 9.6 kg CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent per kg beef, compared with 14.9 kg for the bottom performing third of cattle farms. Reducing this variability is a real opportunity to make progress in reducing emissions from cattle production in Ireland.

Innovations unique to Ireland such as the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP), the Green Low Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme, the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS) and initiatives such as Origin Green, Quality Assurance schemes and Knowledge Transfer Schemes all contribute to lowering the carbon footprint of the sector.

The All-of-Government Plan to tackle climate breakdown identifies 34 actions for the agriculture, forestry and land-use sector that will contribute to our transition to a low carbon economy and society. These include abatement measures, carbon sequestration measures and measures to displace fossil fuels. This reflects our three pillar policy approach to achieving carbon neutrality without comprising sustainable food production.

To achieve the challenging target for the sector set out in this plan, will require immediate action, through early adoption and high levels of take-up of the actions identified across our 139,000 plus family farms.

I see three important actions that can be advanced immediately.

- Deepening engagement with farmers and other stakeholders along the food supply chain to promote the necessary deployment of new technologies and changes in farming practices;

- Improving nitrogen use efficiency such as widespread adoption of low emissions slurry spreading , introduction of clover in grassland swards and improving fertiliser use efficiency; and

- Continuing our support for research and innovation such as animal breeding, improved grassland and fertiliser management and examining the potential of novel feed additives in grass based production systems.

Ongoing negotiations on the future of the next Common Agricultural Policy will ensure that our ambition in this area is aligned with European and national policy while also recognising the importance of a sustainable and viable agricultural sector to rural communities.

I will continue to work with my colleagues across Government to ensure successful implementation of the plan. I am also confident that the agriculture sector as a whole will contribute significantly to Ireland's transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy and society. Recognising the importance of the agricultural sector to our economy and the viability of rural Ireland my Department and associated agencies will strive to meet this challenge head-on to ensure the best possible outcome for all the stakeholders involved.

## Trade Agreements

64. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the Mercosur deal; if the Government continues to resolutely oppose the deal particularly in the context of the market situation pertaining to beef and also in relation to fossil fuel usage relating to the transport of products which are relevant to the deal; and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [28076/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** On the evening of Friday 28 June, the European Commission announced that political agreement has been reached on a trade deal between the EU and Mercosur countries.

While as a small, open economy, Ireland is supportive of international trade deals, I am very concerned at the potential impact of elements of this particular deal on the beef sector.

The agreement includes a significant Tariff Rate Quota for South American beef, at a time when the beef sector in Europe is facing significant uncertainty because of Brexit.

We have made concerted efforts over the full twenty-year history of these negotiations, working closely with other Member State colleagues and engaging directly with the European Commission, in order to minimise the EU offer in terms of beef, and while evidence of these efforts appears to have been reflected in the final offer, I am, nonetheless, deeply concerned at the potential impact on the Irish beef sector and also the clear incoherence between the EU's trade policy and its climate change objectives in the context of increasing beef imports from trade partners producing in a less environmentally sustainable manner

There may be some opportunity for other agri food sectors such as dairy and for the drinks industry, but we will need to examine the text carefully to assess the full impact.

It is also worth noting that this agreement will not come fully into effect for some years. It will first go through a process of legal scrubbing, which could take up to two years, before being put before the European Trade Council for ratification by Qualified Majority Vote, and the European Parliament.

If the agreement passes those hurdles, it is expected that the trade elements which fall under the EU Commission's competence, will be phased in over 6 years.

### **Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme Appeals**

65. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the appeals process for the areas of natural constraint, ANC, scheme with reference to appeals by farmers in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28116/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Under the current Rural Development Regulation (and subsequent amendments under the Omnibus Regulation), Member States were required to change the approach to the designation of land under the Areas of Natural Constraints Scheme. Previously, my Department had been identifying eligible areas using a range of socio-economic indicators such as family farm income, population density, percentage of working population engaged in agriculture and stocking density. From 2019, eligible areas must instead be designated using a defined list of bio-physical criteria such as slope, soil texture, soil rooting depth, soil moisture and drainage.

Further to the completion of the redesignation process, my Department wrote to all farmers holding ANC lands advising them of the status of these lands under the 2019 ANC scheme and advised of their right to appeal this position. The appeals process, overseen by an independently-chaired Appeals Committee, is in place for any farmer who wishes to further appeal the status of a particular townland in the 2019 ANC scheme. Where a farmer notified my Department of their wish to make such an appeal, they have been provided with the relevant information in



relation to the data underpinning the status of the townland in order that an appeal can be based on full information.

My Department received and replied to Notifications of Appeal in respect of 759 individual townlands, of which 271 were in County Wexford. Full appeals in respect of some 314 individual townlands have been made to the Appeals Committee, of which 71 are in County Wexford.

The Independent Appeal Committee has commenced work and is processing the appeals received.

### **Agrifood Sector**

66. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the level of co-operation and planning that exists between his Department and its counterparts in Northern Ireland and the UK in relation to the protection of the agrifood sector on an all-island basis due to the adverse impacts of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28183/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Government believes that the best way forward in dealing with the UK's decision to leave the EU is for the UK to ratify the Withdrawal Agreement. Ireland and the EU are consistent and clear that the Withdrawal Agreement cannot be renegotiated, as reiterated again by President Tusk after the European Council last week.

In the meantime, the Government has agreed that we will continue to plan for all scenarios, including no deal.

Ireland and the EU are at one with regard to our determination to do all we can to avoid the need for a border and to protect the peace process. Work is continuing with the European Commission on how to achieve, in a no deal scenario, our shared objectives of protecting the integrity of the Single Market and Ireland's place in it, and avoiding any physical infrastructure on the island of Ireland.

The EU negotiates on behalf of the Member States, including Ireland, and, therefore, my officials do not negotiate on Brexit issues with UK counterparts. My officials continue to talk to their Northern Ireland counterparts on day-to-day matters to ensure that the agri trade continues to operate efficiently on the island of Ireland.

### **Agriculture Industry**

67. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans and timetable to implement the recommendations of the Teagasc report Analysis of Abatement Potential of Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Irish Agriculture 2021-2030; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28225/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The All-of-Government Plan to tackle climate breakdown identifies a series of actions for the agriculture, forestry and land-use sector that will contribute to our transition to a low carbon economy and society across abatement measures, carbon sequestration measures and displacement of fossil fuels. This reflects our three pillar policy approach to achieving carbon neutrality without comprising sustainable food production

These actions in this all-of-government plan are informed by the recent Teagasc Marginal Cost Abatement Curve report (MACC) - An Analysis of Abatement Potential of Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Irish Agriculture 2021-2030. The Teagasc MACC curve provides an identifiable suite of actions for delivery including both efficiency measures such as the Dairy EBI programme and technical measures such as changes in fertiliser type or low emissions slurry spreading as well as a series of forestry and bioeconomy measures.

To achieve the challenging target for the sector as set out in the All-of-Government Plan will require immediate action and will require early adoption and high levels of take-up of the actions identified across our 139,00 plus family farms.

I see three important actions that can be advanced immediately.

- Deepening engagement with farmers and other stakeholders to promote the necessary deployment of new technologies and changes in farming practices;

- Improving nitrogen use efficiency such as increasing adoption of low emissions slurry spreading, introduction of clover in grassland swards and improving fertiliser efficiency; and

- Continuing our support for research and innovation such as advancing grassland and fertiliser management techniques and examining the potential of novel feed additives in grass based production systems.

I will work to ensure that the next Common Agriculture Policy is aligned with this ambition and that climate action is mainstreamed in the development of our CAP strategic plan to ensure the delivery of this target. Furthermore that enhancements to CAP performance are complemented by market based incentives and regulation where necessary.

Ireland has an opportunity to become a global leader in actions on climate change. If we succeed in our ambition in this area we will create a progressive and sustainable society that is not only economically successful but also offers an enhanced quality of lifestyle to society as a whole.

### **Common Agricultural Policy**

68. **Deputy Tom Neville** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the Common Agricultural Policy negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28265/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The new regulations for the CAP 2021-27 were launched on Friday 1 June 2018 by Commissioner Hogan. The complex proposals involve significant changes, including in relation to governance, the distribution of direct payments among farmers and the increasing environmental ambition of the CAP.

Since their launch, intensive discussions have taken place on the proposals. A significant number of Working Group meetings have been held under both the Austrian and Romanian Presidencies. The proposals have also been discussed extensively at the Special Committee for Agriculture meetings and have been a standing agenda item at every Council of EU Agriculture Ministers meeting.

At the conclusion of the Romanian Presidency's term at the helm, it is clear that good progress has been made, but decisions on many key issues, such as the provisions for Direct



Payments and the New Delivery Model, have still to be agreed upon at EU level. The Finnish Presidency has outlined an intensive programme of Working Party meetings to discuss specific aspects of the new CAP proposals for the duration of its Presidency, which begins now.

Before the new proposals can be implemented, it will be necessary to reach overall agreement within the Council and then together with the European Parliament and Commission. The new Parliament has yet to reach a position in plenary on the proposals. The on-going negotiation on the Multi-annual Financial Framework, which includes the CAP budget, is another key issue that must be resolved.

I will continue to seek to secure the best possible outcome for the Irish agri-food sector.

### **Basic Payment Scheme**

69. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the €60,000 basic payment scheme, BPS, ceiling for direct payments under the next CAP in order to safeguard small and medium sized farmers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28224/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The new legislative proposals for the Common Agricultural Policy 2021 - 2027 involve significant changes, including in relation to governance, the distribution of direct payments among farmers and the increasing environmental conditionality attaching to such payments. The new proposals must commit to a more significant environmental ambition than the current CAP schemes, including in pillar I.

The new proposals include a number of measures relating to distribution of payments, including an overall cap of €100,000, degressivity for payments above €60,000, a complementary redistributive income support, and the convergence of payments towards a minimum of 75% of the average payment per hectare nationally.

I have previously indicated that I am open to some level of capping. Under the current regulations, Ireland has already applied the maximum level of degressivity allowable for direct payments over €150,000.

My Department is carefully considering all aspects of these proposals to assess their potential impact on applicants. It is important that any such mechanisms are straightforward for Member States to administer so that they can be implemented without undue complexity for the farmer.

We are in the midst of intensive and challenging negotiations on these complex proposals. We still have some way to go before agreement - including agreement with the European Parliament as well as finalisation of the Multi-annual Financial Framework - is reached. I will continue to work with the Commission and other Member States to shape these proposals into an effective new CAP.

### **Fishing Industry**

70. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the implications of the agreement reached between Ireland and the United Kingdom in 2013 regarding the setting of the boundaries of the exclusive economic zone; if the agreement of 2013 has possible implications for the present difficulties between Ireland and Scotland re-

garding fishing rights around Rockall; if Irish access to the fishing grounds around Rockall will be guaranteed post-Brexit regardless of the outcome to the ongoing negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28117/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I am advised by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade that the position is as follows.

The exclusive economic zone (EEZ) is the body of water that stretches from 12 nautical miles offshore out to a distance of 200 miles. The seabed beneath the EEZ is the continental shelf.

Largely due to efforts made by Ireland throughout the 1970s, international law is now clear that uninhabitable rocks such as Rockall have no entitlement to a continental shelf or an EEZ and so, sovereignty over such a rock is irrelevant for the purposes of establishing boundaries between continental shelves and EEZs of neighbouring States. Sovereignty, and whether such a rock has a 12-mile territorial sea, are separate issues that do not arise in establishing boundaries between continental shelves and EEZs.

The 2013 Agreement built on the 1988 Agreement between Ireland and the UK that had already established continental shelf boundaries and provides that those boundaries, slightly adjusted to ensure that no waters were lost to the high seas, shall also be the EEZ boundaries. This created a single maritime boundary between 12 and 200 miles in the water and on the seabed beneath.

As you are aware, Ireland has never made any claims to Rockall nor have we recognised British claims to sovereignty over it. Nothing in either Agreement altered that position or represented a departure from our long held view, nor does either Agreement have any implications for the present difficulties between Ireland and Scotland over fishing rights around Rockall.

As regards the situation following Brexit, the Irish and EU position, as set out in the March 2018 European Council Guidelines for negotiations on the future relationship, is that existing reciprocal access to fishing waters and resources should be maintained.

The main purpose of the 2013 Agreement was to resolve jurisdictional uncertainty. It addressed the situation of fishing vessels seeking to avoid inspection in Irish EEZ areas that overlapped with the UK-claimed areas. The issue of Rockall did not arise in the 2013 Agreement as it was not relevant. Importantly, however, it also provides the legal certainty necessary for raising finance to develop renewable energy projects in the areas concerned and it resolved confusion over responsibility for dealing with marine pollution incidents in those areas.

## **Greyhound Industry**

71. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will commission an independent investigation into the greyhound industry on foot of evidence of practices of widespread abuse and cruelty in the industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28215/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Bord na gCon is a commercial State body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

My Department takes any allegations of breaches of animal welfare rules very seriously and will thoroughly investigate and take the necessary enforcement actions to deal with such offences. My Department has a strong and consistent record regarding the enforcement of animal welfare rules, including the review of 100 years of animal welfare legislation, leading to the enactment of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013. A total of 73 successful prosecutions have been taken under the Act since it was brought in, with a further 30 prosecution files currently being processed for welfare abuses.

In addition, this year my Department has provided the largest ever allocation of funding to animal welfare organisations of €2,751,000. A total of 108 organisations are benefitting under these arrangements. An Animal Welfare Lo-call Helpline is in place along with a dedicated email address which facilitates the reporting by members of the public of any suspicion of animal cruelty taking place. All calls received are treated in confidence and are followed up by authorised officers of this Department.

It is worth noting that the Greyhound Sector has undergone a series of reforms in recent times and the Greyhound Racing Act 2019 was signed by the President on the 28th May 2019. The drafting of this legislation strengthens the legal basis for the industry, with a view to fortifying the integrity of the greyhound racing sector and improving provision for greyhound traceability. To this end, I welcome the fact that Bord na gCon will continue to invest significant resources into regulation and greyhound welfare and have announced further actions to improve welfare provision and enforcement.

In addition, in recent days, Bord na gCon has also announced a series of measures that will be implemented:

- The introduction of a greyhound injury support scheme to provide financial assistance to aid injured greyhounds to continue with a healthy life.

- Extending and increasing support for foster care of greyhounds to identify new foster homes within Ireland for greyhounds.

- Revision, in conjunction with the International Greyhound Welfare Forum, of the Code of Practice on the Care and Welfare of the Greyhound to address retirement and transportation of greyhounds.

- Financially incentivise the rehoming of greyhounds in Ireland through the Irish Retired Greyhound Trust (which assisted in the rehoming of 1,021 greyhounds last year).

- Intensify the inspection regime of greyhound establishments (491 inspections were undertaken in 2018).

- Preparation of a statutory instrument to make it a legal requirement that euthanasia of a greyhound must be carried out by a veterinary practitioner. (This is already the standard expected under the IGB Code of Practice for the Care and Welfare of the Greyhound).

- Provision of the Code of Practice to all registered greyhound owners

- Progress the traceability provisions of the Greyhound Act 2019

- Establish a confidential Freephone line to enable reports of welfare breaches to be reported to the IGB for investigation by relevant agencies.

Minister Doyle will be meeting with the Board of Bord na gCon this week to discuss these and any other measures that may be required to bring about comprehensive changes in the

sector. For these reasons, an action plan for the industry will be carefully considered and announced by my Department in due course.

### **Greyhound Industry**

72. **Deputy Bríd Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if all funding to the greyhound industry will be suspended in view of a television documentary (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28214/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Bord na gCon is a commercial State body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Under Section 12 of the Horse and Greyhound Racing Act, 2001 (No.20 of 2001), the horse and greyhound racing industries receive €84m in financial support from the State through the Horse and Greyhound Racing Fund (the Fund). Monies are paid out of the fund in the ratio of 80% to Horse Racing Ireland and 20% to Bord na gCon as specified in Section 12 (6) of the Act. State funding provided through the Fund is pivotal to the survival of the horse and greyhound racing industries.

According to the 2017 Power Report, the greyhound industry provides and supports considerable employment both directly and indirectly across the Irish economy. It is estimated that in 2016, the industry supported 5,058 full-time and part-time jobs in the economy. In addition, there are 7,313 active greyhound owners. The total number of people deriving economic benefit from the sector is estimated at 12,371. It is an industry that is ingrained in the social and cultural networks of rural Ireland.

It is worth noting that the Greyhound Sector has undergone a series of reforms in recent times and the Greyhound Racing Act 2019 was signed by the President on the 28th May 2019. This legislation strengthens the legal basis for the industry, with a view to fortifying the integrity of the greyhound racing sector and improving provision for greyhound traceability. To this end, I welcome the fact that Bord na gCon will continue to invest significant resources into regulation and greyhound welfare. Following the RTE Investigates Programme, the Board of Bord Na gCon has just announced that further resources will be devoted to the areas of traceability, fostering and re-homing of greyhounds and an increase in the levels of inspection of greyhound establishments.

I am very concerned that steps must immediately be taken to address the issues raised in the programme referred to by the Deputy. However, the suspension of funds could have immediate consequences for employment in the sector and could have unintended consequences for the welfare of dogs bred for racing and coursing.

### **European Maritime and Fisheries Fund**

73. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number and description of projects under the marine biodiversity initiatives with a delayed start in 2017 with an associated underspend of €0.5 million; the commencement and completion dates of each project; the cost of each project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28199/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department's European Maritime and Fisheries Fund Operational Programme is the vehicle for financial supports to the seafood sector for the period 2014 to 2020. The Programme delivers a wide range of supports including marine biodiversity initiatives through a suite of schemes.

The Programme is co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union and provides €239.3 million in funding - an investment of €91.7 million provided by the Government of Ireland and €147.6 million provided by the European Union.

The Marine Biodiversity scheme, to which my Department has allocated €9.4 million up to the end of 2020, aims to promote good fisheries and aquaculture management and to protect biodiversity in marine habitats in support of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directives (Natura 2000) and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD).

The scheme is currently in its fourth Operation. The first Operation was implemented in 2016 when eight projects were completed at a cost of €278,000. Projects focussed on the compliance of fisheries and aquaculture in and close to Natura sites and included:

- Assessing fishing impacts on vulnerable habitats;
- Monitoring of fishing footprint and catch composition of vessels <12m close to Natura sites;
- Appropriate Assessments of aquaculture activities in Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protected Areas (SPAs);
- Investigations of bird use and aquaculture practices in Natura sites;
- Measuring the effectiveness of mitigation measures of managed activities (aquaculture) carried out in Natura sites.

The second Operation was implemented in 2017 with 12 projects, which were completed in 2018 at a cost of approximately €3.2 million.

Projects in the second operation widened their scope to include species and habitat restoration, MSFD and biodiversity support and Informatics to support the ecosystem approach to fisheries.

The third operation was implemented in 2018 and four projects are ongoing until the end of the programme and include species restoration (native oyster) and habitat and species monitoring to support Natura and MSFD.

Activities and projects which commenced under Operation 2 will continue in a second phase under Operation 4 with further projects currently implemented for MSFD support and deepwater biodiversity.

Further details all marine biodiversity projects can be found on the following website at: <https://emff.marine.ie/marine-biodiversity>

In 2017, there was an underspend in EMFF Marine Biodiversity projects of €478,091 in relation to actual spent vs. 2017 estimates. The following reasons were provided to my Department by the Marine Institute:

- Procurement lag for a number of projects.



- One project was withdrawn;
- Funds from other agencies which led a reduced drawdown.
- Some project costs were lower than originally anticipated.

Despite this underspend, the Marine Biodiversity Scheme has been very successful and is a very important scheme to understand Ireland's Marine biodiversity and the impact of the seafood sectors on it. I expect that the full allocation of €9.4 million will be spent at the end of 2020.

## **Greyhound Industry**

74. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which he can address the issues raised in a programme (details supplied) regarding the treatment of greyhounds here; and his views on whether the time has come to take robust action on exports of greyhounds and to examine a complete ban on live hare coursing. [28122/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department takes any allegations of breaches of animal welfare rules very seriously and will thoroughly investigate and take the necessary enforcement actions to deal with such offences.

In particular, my Department is engaging in a review of the licensing conditions in knackeries, with regard to practices seen on RTÉ. All allegations will be examined to determine the appropriate actions.

Bord na gCon, in addition to its focus on the core business of greyhound racing, places a strong emphasis on regulation of the industry and the welfare of greyhounds. It is evident that the successful growth and sustainability of the industry is heavily dependent on public confidence in the integrity of racing.

It is worth noting that the Greyhound Sector has undergone a series of reforms in recent times and the Greyhound Racing Act 2019 was signed by the President on the 28th May 2019. The drafting of this legislation strengthens the legal basis for the industry, with a view to fortifying the integrity of the greyhound racing sector and improving provision for greyhound traceability.

Bord na gCon only encourages and promotes the export of greyhounds to countries that have established a positive animal welfare code and practices. My Department understands that Bord na gCon is currently updating its Code of Practice in the Care and Welfare of the Greyhound to include provisions on best practice when exporting greyhounds, including advice to the exporter on the need to research the proposed export destination in relation to its animal welfare standards and legislation.

In recent days, Bord na gCon has also announced a series of measures that will be implemented:

- The introduction of a greyhound injury support scheme to provide financial assistance to aid injured greyhounds to continue with a healthy life.
- Extending and increasing support for foster care of greyhounds to identify new foster homes within Ireland for greyhounds.
- Revision, in conjunction with the International Greyhound Welfare Forum, of the Code of



Practice on the Care and Welfare of the Greyhound to address retirement and transportation of greyhounds.

- Financially incentivise the rehoming of greyhounds in Ireland through the Irish Retired Greyhound Trust (which assisted in the rehoming of 1,021 greyhounds last year).

- Intensify the inspection regime of greyhound establishments (491 inspections were undertaken in 2018).

- Preparation of a statutory instrument to make it a legal requirement that euthanasia of a greyhound must be carried out by a veterinary practitioner. (This is already the standard expected under the IGB Code of Practice for the Care and Welfare of the Greyhound).

- Provision of the Code of Practice to all registered greyhound owners

- Progress the traceability provisions of the Greyhound Act 2019

- Establish a confidential Freephone line to enable reports of welfare breaches to be reported to the IGB for investigation by relevant agencies.

Minister Doyle will be meeting with the Board of Bord na gCon this week to discuss these and any other measures that may be required to bring about comprehensive changes in the sector. For these reasons, an action plan for the industry will be carefully considered and announced by my Department in due course.

My Department is not in a position to know whether dogs, including greyhounds, that are moved from Ireland to another EU Member State are subsequently exported to a further country. The export of dogs from other member states is a matter for the authorities in those member states.

In relation to coursing, under the provisions of the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958, the regulation of coursing is chiefly a matter for the Irish Coursing Club (ICC) subject to the general control and direction of Bord na gCon. Hares can only be collected for coursing by clubs affiliated to the ICC in accordance with the terms of two licences granted by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

A Monitoring Committee on Coursing is in place, comprising officials from my Department, the ICC and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), to monitor developments in coursing. I believe that it is critically important that those involved in coursing operate in accordance with the regulatory framework and that the welfare of both hares and greyhounds is kept in mind at all times. The allegations of an illegal coursing meeting set out in the recent RTE Investigates Programme are currently examined by Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

## **Beef Imports**

75. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the detail of beef imports for the first quarter of 2019; the number of tonnes imported; the countries from which such imports took place; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28077/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** According to Central Statistics Office (CSO) data, imports of beef into Ireland for the first quarter of 2019 are relatively small, with 7,310 tonnes or €30.4m seen during this period. These figures are a reduction on the 11,714 tonnes, or €33.7m, registered during the same period in 2018. This

equates to a 33% decline in volume.

In Q1 2019, the main country that we imported beef from was Great Britain, with 5,541 tonnes. This means that Great Britain makes up 75% of all our imported beef for the period in question, followed by Northern Ireland with 992 tonnes, or 13.5%, of the total.

Overall, EU member states made up 99% of all our beef imports, with 7,235 tonnes or €30m imported in the first quarter of 2019. Imports from third countries during this period were very small with 2 tonnes being imported from Brazil, and 1 tonne from Switzerland.

### **Sheep Welfare Scheme Data**

76. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of farmers deemed ineligible for the sheep welfare scheme in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019 due to the fact they did not lodge their sheep census in time; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28081/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I introduced the Sheep Welfare Scheme in December 2016 in order to provide support for sheep farmers in improving welfare standards in the national sheep flock. Participating farmers are paid €10 per eligible ewe, and to date some €36m has issued to farmers under the Scheme in respect of the first 2 years of the Scheme.

Given that payments under the Scheme are based on animal numbers, participants are required each year to submit their Sheep Census to my Department. This requirement is set out in the terms and conditions of the Scheme. The numbers of farmers in each year who submitted late Census forms are as follows:

2017 - 476

2018 - 381

2019 - 579

Participants in the scheme who do not submit their Sheep Census return by the due date are notified in writing by my Department and are provided with an opportunity to lodge an appeal outlining the circumstances relating to the late submission.

### **Ministerial Meetings**

77. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will report on his discussion with a person (details supplied) while in Cork recently; and if beef prices were discussed. [20554/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I can confirm that an informal discussion occurred on the date indicated, between myself and the IFA President, in which various issues relating to the Beef sector, including market conditions, were raised.

As the Deputy will be aware, as Minister for Agriculture, I have no role in determining prices for any commodity nor can I intervene in the same.

The Beef Sector is an important element of the Irish economy and I am conscious of the

importance that this key sector plays in rural Ireland.

I am keenly aware that the past few months have been very challenging for beef farmers in particular, following a difficult year for farm incomes in 2018 due to weather conditions. There was a prolonged and exceptional period of depressed prices lasting from autumn 2018 to spring 2019, with the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the outcome of Brexit, among other factors, contributing to this market disturbance.

The recent announcement by Commissioner Hogan of EU exceptional aid for the Irish beef sector is very welcome in this context. I have been making the case for some time for an exceptional aid package from the EU Commission for Irish beef farmers, at EU Council of Agriculture Minister meetings and in direct consultation with the Commission.

Further details on the aid package will be announced in due course following the appropriate stakeholder consultation.

The Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) is currently the main support specifically targeted for the suckler sector, which provides Irish beef farmers with some €300 million in funding over the current RDP period. Building on this is the exchequer funded Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot (BEEP), a €20 million pilot project for 2019.

My Department has rolled out a range of schemes as part of the €4 billion Rural Development Programme (RDP), 2014 - 2020. In addition to the BDGP, other supports which are available for suckler farmers under Pillar II of the CAP include GLAS, ANCs and Knowledge Transfer Groups. Suckler farmers also benefit from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Greening payments under CAP Pillar I.

My Department is examining all appropriate measures to support the different agrifood sectors, including the suckler sector in preparation for the next iteration of the CAP, and through the next Agri Food strategy to 2030. My view is that such measures should support and encourage suckler farmers to make the best decisions possible to improve the profitability and the economic and environmental efficiency of their farming system.

### **Fallen Animal Collection Scheme**

78. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the limitation of 125 km in respect of distance restriction applied here to the transport of category 1 animal waste is not related to any European legislation; if European animal by-product legislation does not contain distance limitation in relation to the transport of category 1 by-products and that such limitations as imposed here arises from policy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28080/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Fallen Animal TSE Subsidy Scheme is an integral part of the infrastructure underpinning Ireland's successful livestock and meat processing industries.

The Scheme ensures primarily that fallen bovine animals over 48 months, which must be BSE-tested in accordance with EU legislation, are disposed of in compliance with all animal and public health and environmental regulations. The 125km rule relates only to fallen animals over 48 months of age that are collected under this scheme.

A review of the Fallen Animal TSE Subsidy Scheme was undertaken in 2013, in consultation with stakeholders. This review took into account TSE testing requirements, Animal By-Product

(ABP) regulations, budgetary considerations, the need to maintain competition and the need for an adequate collection and disposal infrastructure including the availability of adequate rendering capacity especially in the event of a serious (Class A) disease outbreak.

Following completion of the consultation process, a number of changes were introduced to the scheme in 2013 with regard to the collection of fallen animals. Those included enhanced compliance provisions and putting limits on the distance material can be transported while maintaining a competitive aspect to the market.

Under the revised terms of the scheme, the haulage distance for material to which the scheme applies from the intermediate plant (knackery) to rendering plant shall not exceed 125kms radius unless with the prior approval of my Department. The scheme also provides that, where there are not two or more rendering premises inside 125km radius from the intermediate plant, then delivery is permitted to either of the two nearest rendering premises as measured by road.

The rule relating to the distance between knackery and rendering plant only applies to animals under the Fallen Animal TSE Subsidy scheme, that is, bovine animals over 48 months. An operator is free to dispose of animals not eligible under the scheme to a licensed plant of their choice and the arrangements made are a commercial matter between them.

### **Agrifood Sector**

79. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the discussions being held with his counterparts in Northern Ireland and the UK in relation to the need to minimise disruption to the agrifood sector both North and South in the context of Brexit in view of the interdependence of the sector on an all-island basis; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28182/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Government believes strongly that the best way forward in dealing with the UK's decision to leave the EU is for the UK to ratify the Withdrawal Agreement. Ireland and the EU are consistent and clear that the Withdrawal Agreement cannot be renegotiated, as reiterated again by President Tusk after the European Council last week.

In the meantime, the Government has agreed that we will continue to plan for all scenarios, including the possibility of a no-deal Brexit.

Ireland and the EU are at one with regard to our determination to do all we can to avoid the need for a border and to protect the peace process. Discussions are continuing with the European Commission on how to achieve, in a no-deal scenario, our shared objectives of protecting the integrity of the Single Market and Ireland's place in it, and avoiding any physical infrastructure on the island of Ireland.

The EU negotiates on behalf of the Member States, including Ireland, and, therefore, my officials do not negotiate on Brexit issues with UK counterparts. My officials continue to talk to their Northern Ireland counterparts on day-to-day matters to ensure that the agri trade continues to operate efficiently on the island of Ireland.

### **Trade Agreements**

80. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will report on the Mercosur deal; the main remaining barriers; if there are red line issues;

and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28121/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** On the evening of Friday 28 June, European Commissioner for Trade, Cecilia Malmström and Commissioner for Agriculture, Phil Hogan, announced that political agreement has been reached on a trade deal between the EU and Mercosur countries.

While as a small, open economy, Ireland is supportive of international trade deals, I am very concerned at the potential impact of elements of this particular deal on the beef sector.

The agreement includes a significant Tariff Rate Quota for South American beef, at a time when the beef sector in Europe is facing significant uncertainty because of Brexit. We have made concerted efforts over the full twenty-year history of these negotiations, working closely with other Member State colleagues and engaging directly with the European Commission, in order to minimise the EU offer in terms of beef. While evidence of these efforts appears to have been reflected in the final offer, I am, nonetheless, deeply concerned at the potential impact on the Irish beef sector.

There may be some opportunity for other agri food sectors such as dairy and for the drinks industry, but we will need to examine the text carefully to assess the full impact.

It is also worth noting that this agreement will not come fully into effect for some years. It will first go through a process of legal scrubbing, which could take up to two years, before being put before the European Trade Council for ratification by Qualified Majority Vote, and the European Parliament.

If the agreement passes those hurdles, it is expected that the trade elements which fall under the EU Commission's competence, will be phased in over 6 years.

*Question No. 81 answered with Question No. 49.*

### **Live Exports**

82. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he has prepared for adequate lairage at Cherbourg to cater for calf exports in spring 2020 to avoid congestion and to allow the maximum number of calves to be exported in 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28201/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Live exports are a critical part of Ireland's livestock industry. They play a significant role in stimulating price competition and providing an alternative market outlet for farmers. My Department facilitates this trade, recognising its importance to the agri-food sector, while placing a strong emphasis on the welfare of all animals being transported.

In 2018, total live exports of cattle increased by over 30% compared to 2017, to 246,000 head. This growth trend has continued into 2019, with live exports already totalling 225,000 up until the week ending the 23rd of June. This is up from 173,000 for the same period in 2018 – a 30% increase.

This increase is in part down to my decision in 2017 to reduce the veterinary inspection fee payable on live exports of calves less than three months of age from €4.80 to €1.20. This has brought greater equity to the inspection fee regime. Since then, there has been continued growth in the export of calves, rising from 102,000 in 2017 to 159,000 in 2018. We have already sur-



passed this figure in 2019, with 184,000 calves having been exported in the year to date.

With regard to lairage capacity, I would urge the live export sector to consider developing an additional lairage in Cherbourg, or engaging with owners of existing facilities to explore the potential for additional capacity. This has proved possible – as evidenced by the French authorities approving an increase of the holding capacity of the Qualivia lairage in Cherbourg earlier this year. My Department worked closely with the French authorities in this matter. The move provided for additional daily capacity for 400 animals, providing increased capacity of some 1,200 animals per week

In my meetings with live exporters, I have suggested that a representative group be set up to represent their interests with a view to enhancing coordination in relation to the live export trade. The Deputy will be aware that the Joint Oireachtas Committee for Agriculture, Food and the Marine's recent 'Report on the future of the Beef Sector in the context of Food Wise 2025' also makes this recommendation.

*Question No. 83 answered with Question No. 49.*

### **Hare Coursing**

84. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will consider the suspension of live hare coursing until after the findings of the EU Directive 92/43/EEC report due to be published later in 2019, in view of the questions raised over the status of the Irish hare; if his Department has consulted with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht regarding the effects of coursing on hare population trends; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28123/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Under the provisions of the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958, the regulation of coursing is chiefly a matter for the Irish Coursing Club (ICC) subject to the general control and direction of Bord na gCon (BnG).

The ICC has assured my Department that it has systems and practices in place to underpin the welfare of hares and greyhounds involved in coursing. Hares can only be collected for coursing by clubs affiliated to the ICC, in accordance with the terms of two licences granted by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

These licences contain 26 conditions which have been refined over the years, the majority of which are central to hare welfare. These include a variety of measures, including a requirement that a qualified veterinarian attends all coursing meetings to report on the health of the hares, a prohibition on the coursing of hares more than once in the same day, a prohibition on the coursing of sick or pregnant hares and a requirement that hares be released back into the wild during daylight hours.

The ICC also attends to the welfare of the hare and undertakes a range of actions to address issues related to health and welfare. Coursing clubs are required to comply with directives, instructions and guidance notes issued by the ICC in all matters relating to the capture, keeping in captivity, tagging, marking, coursing and release of hares, and the muzzling of greyhounds.

A Monitoring Committee on Coursing is in place, comprising officials from my Department, the ICC and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), to monitor developments in coursing and, in that regard, the situation is kept under constant review to ensure that coursing is run in a well controlled and responsible manner in the interests of both hares and greyhounds.



The Habitats Directive ensures the conservation of a wide range of rare, threatened or endemic animal and plant species. Some 200 rare and characteristic habitat types are also targeted for conservation in their own right.

The report of the EU Directive 92/43/EEC is a matter for the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the findings will be discussed at the next monitoring committee meeting following its publication.

I believe that it is critically important that those involved in coursing operate in accordance with the regulatory framework and that the welfare of both hares and greyhounds is prevalent at all times.

### **Forest Fires**

85. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine further to Parliamentary Question No. 60 of 3 October 2017, the overall cost of the fire of Cloosh Valley, County Galway in May 2017; the number of hectares of both forestry and bogland lost; the impact on the flora, fauna and wildlife; the results of investigations carried out by Coillte, his Department or another body; if prosecutions for breach of section 40 of the Wildlife Acts resulted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28200/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The management of the Coillte forest estate is a matter for, and the responsibility of, Coillte as a State Body and they are operationally independent in their remit.

In order to update on the PQ response referred to above, this matter was raised with Coillte. I am advised that the forest fire of May 2017 was fought along three separate fronts - a bog fire, a thicket fire and the most dangerous of all, a tree crown fire. The fire was tackled for five days by more than 35 Coillte staff and contractors, three helicopters, two fire tenders and as well as 30 army personnel to finally bring it under control.

Cloosh is also home to the Galway Wind Park renewable energy development and contains millions of euro of wind turbines and associated infrastructure. Through the hard work and dedication of all the firefighters, none of the nationally important wind energy structures were damaged by the fire.

Coillte also advise that subsequent to the fire being brought under control, they completed a detailed and precise inventory of the damage to Cloosh using a combination of Aerial Photography and Ground Survey techniques. Coillte local management also developed a Forest Management Plan for the area, aimed at categorising the damage and determining the regeneration plan required to re-establish the forest.

Results of this inventory show that the total area in Cloosh that was damaged by fire was 1,213 ha. Of this figure, 828 ha was categorised as forest, with the balance of 385 ha being classified as non-forest (e.g. Bare, Undeveloped, Swamp, peatlands).

Coillte advise that costs of the forest fires to them are calculated across a variety of different activities required to both bring the fire under control and subsequently to prepare and replant the forest and, of course, the loss of value of the standing timber. The costs involved can be broken down into the following headings:

**Fire-Fighting costs** – Direct costs involved in bringing the fire under control;

**Clean up costs** – these costs are to make the site fit for regeneration or replanting following the fire. The actual costs will depend on the extent of replanting the forested areas and any offsetting revenue from harvesting the damaged timber;

**Regeneration cost** – this is the cost to replant the non-productive forest area and is dependent on the level and type of planting that Coillte undertake;

**Additional Project costs** – the costs of any additional projects that may be required from extra overheads incurred in managing the area;

**Depletion cost** – this reflects the costs of depleting the total forested area less an area of 67 ha which had been recently felled before the fire.

Overall, the total cost of the Cloosh fire is estimated by Coillte at approximately €3 million. Coillte add that they are not aware of any prosecutions for breach of section 40 of the Wildlife Acts resulting from the fire at Cloosh.

Finally, I believe that the recommendations of the 2017 Government Task Force report on wildfires informed preparedness and operational responses to wildfire during the very challenging 2018 fire season. Recommendations particularly influenced improvements in respect of air support readiness and military aid to civil power support for firefighting interventions at large scale wildfires. These improvements were readily apparent during the extended firefighting operations in the Slieve Bloom Mountains during July 2018 and at several other large scale incidents across the country at that time.

My Department continues to issue forest fire warnings where appropriate, particularly in advance of high-risk periods such as high temperatures. These include advice on preparedness and appropriate responses and are intended to inform relevant stakeholders and the general public.

### **Forestry Sector**

86. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide adequate compensation for forestry owners who have suffered losses due to ash die back; if grants will be provided for replacement planting; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28202/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I am well aware of the impact of Ash Dieback on Ireland's ash plantations. Indeed, we have taken the lead in Europe in terms of a response to this disease. In the first place, an exchequer-funded reconstitution scheme was introduced in 2013 to restore affected forests and, since then, over 1,600 hectares have been restored at a cost of €4.4 million. In addition, the Woodland Improvement Thinning and Tending scheme is available to forest owners in terms of managing the continuing impact of the disease.

While the reconstitution scheme was a reasonable response at the time, it became evident that given the progression and reach of the disease and based on the scientific knowledge available, a review of the scheme was needed. The original aims of the scheme i.e. eradication of the disease from Ireland, were no longer achievable, as the disease is now considered endemic here. Given that the scientific outlook had changed, the scheme was therefore suspended in April 2018, in order that a comprehensive review could be undertaken. However landowners who wished to continue growing their ash forest, where the presence of the disease was low, could continue to be paid their annual premiums.

The review process has included stakeholder and public consultation and detailed field consideration of damage level evaluation together with an examination of a broader range of silvicultural and management options available to forest owners. Advice from Teagasc and international experts has also been received. Current support schemes were examined to ensure their continued relevance and that they represent value for money for both the taxpayer and the forest owner. It seems that a broader and more responsive range of options will be needed to assist forest owners in managing affected forests and consideration is currently being given to the financial aspects of this new approach.

I hope to be in a position to announce the full results of the review shortly.

*Questions Nos. 87 and 88 answered with Question No. 49.*

### **Sheepmeat Sector**

89. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which foreign trade missions in 2019 will benefit the sheep meat sector here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28079/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The pursuit and development of new markets for Irish agri-food exports is a constant and central component of the strategic development of the industry, as evidenced by its placement at the centre of Food Wise 2025, the industry's strategy for development. Food Wise 2025 prioritises the potential for growth in new and emerging markets, particularly in Asia, Africa, the Americas and the Gulf region.

Trade Missions play an important role in this market development. I have been very active on this front in 2019, with successful trade missions completed to date to Turkey, China, Japan and Korea.

In May, during the China Trade mission, I met with Zhang Jiwen - Vice Minister of General Administration of Customs in China (GACC) and his officials. After this meeting, I was able to confirm that we have commenced the first steps with regard to market access for sheepmeat to China. Officials from GACC will visit Ireland this August to inspect five sheep meat plants that wish to export to China.

In June, on the Japanese trade mission, I met both my counterpart, Japanese Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), Takamori Yoshikawa and the Vice Minister for Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), Masayoshi Shintani. These Ministerial meetings followed detailed technical meetings involving senior officials from both Ministries. At the conclusion of these meetings, I was delighted to announce that we had reached agreement in principle on market access for Irish sheepmeat. Details will be finalised by an exchange of letters between my Department and the relevant Japanese officials

These achievements are tangible results of the increased focus of my Department on opening and enhancing access to key markets. This success has taken detailed work by our market access experts, audit and inspection visits by competent authorities from international markets, and an intensified agri-food trade mission agenda. This work is informed and supported by Bord Bia's market insights, strategic marketing and promotion programme. This intensive work programme reflects our shared Food Wise strategy and represents a fundamental and practical response to the challenges posed by Brexit.

## **Greyhound Industry**

90. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the action he plans to take following the revelations of a programme (details supplied) on the subject of the greyhound industry here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28228/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department takes any allegations of breaches of animal welfare rules very seriously and will thoroughly investigate and take the necessary enforcement actions to deal with such offences. In particular, my Department is engaging in a review of the licensing conditions in knackereries, with regard to practices seen on RTÉ. All allegations will be examined to determine the appropriate actions. In addition to its focus on the core business of greyhound racing, Bord na gCon places an emphasis on regulation of the industry and the welfare of greyhounds. It is evident that the successful growth and sustainability of the industry is heavily dependent on public confidence in the integrity of racing.

It is worth noting that the Greyhound Sector has undergone a series of reforms in recent times and the Greyhound Racing Act 2019 was signed by the President on the 28th May 2019. The drafting of this legislation strengthens the legal basis for the industry, with a view to fortifying the integrity of the greyhound racing sector and improving provision for greyhound traceability. To this end, I welcome the fact that Bord na gCon will continue to invest significant resources into regulation and greyhound welfare.

Under the Act, Bord na gCon may make regulations to require the registration of greyhound owners, the registration of racing greyhounds and the notification by owners, breeders and trainers of greyhounds of many more life events than those currently captured on existing studbook and micro-chipping databases. The regulations will support establishment of a new comprehensive tracing database for racing greyhounds.

In recent days, Bord na gCon has also announced a series of measures that will be implemented:

- The introduction of a greyhound injury support scheme to provide financial assistance to aid injured greyhounds to continue with a healthy life.

- Extending and increasing support for foster care of greyhounds to identify new foster homes within Ireland for greyhounds.

- Revision, in conjunction with the International Greyhound Welfare Forum, of the Code of Practice on the Care and Welfare of the Greyhound to address retirement and transportation of greyhounds.

- Financially incentivise the rehoming of greyhounds in Ireland through the Irish Retired Greyhound Trust (which assisted in the rehoming of 1,021 greyhounds last year).

- Intensify the inspection regime of greyhound establishments (491 inspections were undertaken in 2018).

- Preparation of a statutory instrument to make it a legal requirement that euthanasia of a greyhound must be carried out by a veterinary practitioner. (This is already the standard expected under the IGB Code of Practice for the Care and Welfare of the Greyhound).

- Provision of the Code of Practice to all registered greyhound owners

- Progress the traceability provisions of the Greyhound Act 2019

- Establish a confidential Freephone line to enable reports of welfare breaches to be reported to the IGB for investigation by relevant agencies.

Minister Doyle will be meeting with the Board of Bord na gCon this week to discuss these and any other measures that may be required to bring about comprehensive changes in the sector. For these reasons, an action plan for the industry will be carefully considered and announced by my Department in due course.

I can assure the Deputy that the practices highlighted in the RTE Prime Time programme will be fully addressed. It is in the interests of the greyhound sector to operate at the highest ethical and welfare standards and that is what the citizens of this country expect.

### **Fishing Industry**

91. **Deputy Pat The Cope Gallagher** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the ongoing talks regarding the fishing grounds surrounding Rockall; if Irish access to these waters will be guaranteed in line with decades of fishing traditions in view of the fact that successive Governments have refused to recognise foreign claims on Rockall; the extent of talks between Ireland and the European Union and the Scottish Government at present; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28118/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As the Deputy states, Ireland does not recognise the United Kingdom's claim to sovereignty over Rockall. The waters around Rockall, including within 12 nautical miles, are part of the ICES sea area 6b, within which Irish vessels, like those of other EU Member States, have a right of access under the Common Fisheries Policy.

The Irish Government has consistently said this matter should be dealt with through diplomacy and dialogue. In that context, a process of intense engagement is now under way, led by senior Ministers from both administrations and supported by senior officials.

Our shared aim is to resolve differences over Rockall in a way which benefits both countries, and to develop further an already strong bilateral relationship.

### **Live Exports**

92. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the way in which live exports have performed in 2018 and to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28269/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Live exports are a critical part of Ireland's livestock industry. They play a significant role in stimulating price competition and providing an alternative market outlet for farmers. My Department facilitates this trade, recognising its importance to the agri-food sector, while placing a strong emphasis on the welfare of all animals being transported.

In 2018, total live exports of cattle increased by over 30% compared to 2017, to 246,000 head. This growth trend has continued into 2019, with live exports already totalling 225,000 up until the week ending the 23rd of June. This is up from 173,000 for the same period in 2018 – a 30% increase.

This increase is in part down to my decision to reduce the veterinary inspection fee payable



on live exports of calves less than three months of age from €4.80 to €1.20. This has brought greater equity to the inspection fee regime. Since then, there has been continued growth in the export of calves, rising from 102,000 in 2017 to 159,000 in 2018. We have already surpassed this figure in 2019, with 184,000 calves having been exported in the year to date.

My Department continues to prioritise efforts to deepen existing markets and gain access to new third country markets. In early May, my Department hosted a visit by a Turkish technical team, including officials from the Ministry of Agriculture and ESK (the Turkish Meat and Milk Board). The objective of the visit was to conduct an on-site fact-finding mission to evaluate the technical aspects of live animal and germinal product exports from Ireland to Turkey. This is yet another welcome development as we seek to re-establish our live trade with Turkey. The visit by Turkish officials follows on from my March meeting with my Turkish counterpart, Dr Bekir Pakdemirli, Minister for Agriculture and Forestry.

With regard to other third country markets:

- In April, my Department reached agreement with the Egyptian authorities on three proposed health certificates for the export of fattening, slaughter and breeding cattle.

- Also in April, a departmental Technical Delegation to Algeria reached agreement on three revised and separate health certificates for the export of fattening, slaughter and breeding cattle. My technical experts moved quickly to oversee the changes to the health certificates and we await Algerian authorities imprimatur prior to the commencement of the revised trade conditions.

- I met with the Kazakh Ambassador in late March to discuss new health certification for the trade of live animals to Kazakhstan. Progress was made in relation to opening the Kazakh market.

With regard to animal welfare, my Department maintains robust oversight of live trade, through a comprehensive legislative framework, and in my meetings with exporters, I have stressed the importance of high animal welfare standards. Irish legislation on sea transport is recognised by the European Commission as being among the most effective and stringent legislation in force on transport by sea.

As has been the case in recent weeks, with regard to road transport, the Department does not approve journey logs from exporters for any live export where the destination country has an orange or red weather alert in place, or where a significant part of the transit route goes through an orange or red alert area. This is in addition to the annual ban on road transport of livestock to Greece, North Africa and Turkey during the months of July and August.

Furthermore, my Department continues to proactively contribute to efforts to improve animal welfare standards during transport. My Department is currently providing multiannual funding of €75,000 per year over four years to the OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health) towards the implementation of the second Action Plan of the OIE Platform on Animal Welfare for Europe, in relation to slaughter and transport, within Europe and between Europe and the Middle East and North Africa.

### **Departmental Schemes**

93. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the future growth loans scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28267/19]



**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Future Growth Loan Scheme has been open for loan eligibility applications through the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland's (SBCI) website since 17th April. I was pleased to launch the Scheme earlier this year with my colleagues, and I recently attended Bank of Ireland's own launch of the product. Bank of Ireland is open for applications and drawdowns of approved loans. The SBCI continue to engage with other banks on their timetable for the Scheme and additional announcements in this regard are expected shortly.

The Scheme was developed by my Department and the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, in partnership with the Department of Finance, the SBCI and the European Investment Fund (EIF). It will be delivered through participating finance providers and make up to €300 million of investment loans available to eligible Irish businesses, including farmers and the agri-food & seafood sectors.

The loans will be competitively priced with an initial maximum loan interest rate of 4.5% for loans less than €250,000. The loans are for terms of 8-10 years and unsecured up to €500,000. This type of innovative finance, which has been previously unavailable in the Irish market, will support strategic long-term investment in a post-Brexit environment.

A minimum loan amount of €100,000 applies up to a maximum of €3,000,000 per applicant. However, considering the needs of Irish farmers, I have negotiated a specific minimum of €50,000 for them.

This is a long-awaited source of finance for young and new entrant farmers, especially the cohort who do not have high levels of security. It will also serve smaller-scale farmers, who often do not have the leverage to negotiate for more favourable terms with their banking institution.

Food companies have identified long term investment finance of up to ten years as a critical need which is currently unavailable in Ireland.

I am pleased that the Government have been able to deliver this product and its effects will be felt all along the food production chain, from primary producer to processor.

### **Afforestation Programme**

94. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the efforts made to address the failure to meet afforestation targets and to develop a higher proportion of native and broadleaf forestry within the national forest estate; his engagement with Coillte in this regard and with regard to developing community woodlands; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28232/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Forests in Ireland have multifunctional benefits and it is for this reason that the State continues to invest heavily in new afforestation. The Government's Climate Action Plan 2019 recognises the key role afforestation has to play in climate change mitigation particularly through carbon sequestration.

The Climate Action Plan now sets a target of an average of 8,000 hectares of new planting per year.

While planting rates in recent years have been less than expected, I believe this is due to a number of factors, including competition for land and increasing land prices in recent years.

The role of my Department is to secure an annual budget for new forests and also to act as the planning authority in assessing applications for these new sites. It is worth noting that we have approved an average of 9,000 hectares per annum for afforestation over the last 3 years, but the conversion rate to planting remains on average around 60% of the approval issued. This means the Irish forestry sector currently has at its disposal almost 10,000 hectares of approved and shovel-ready land which could be planted today. The challenge is to ensure that all the effort that goes into securing and approving new sites results in those sites being planted, if the planting levels are to increase.

In response, my Department has funded a number of new promotion initiatives. We are funding Teagasc to carry out a Forestry Promotion Campaign covering the period 2018 – 2020 specifically aimed at farmers. My Department has also funded a carbon navigator for forestry that will help illustrate to farmers the valuable contribution forestry can make in removing carbon from our atmosphere. This new tool will be launched later this year. Furthermore, 15 promotion projects around the Country were approved earlier this year, which will roll out initiatives which highlight the multifunctional benefits of forestry, promote planting of more trees and encourage sustainable forest management.

We also introduced higher rates and additional measures under the midterm review of the Forestry Programme in 2018, aimed particularly at boosting the planting of broadleaves and native woodlands. These measures have paid off and, so far, broadleaf planting has increased from 21% in 2017 to 27% in 2018. There has been an increase in Native Woodlands planted too, with 172 hectares planted so far in 2019, up over 95% compared to the previous year.

Another interesting development has been the launch of the Woodland Environmental Fund in September, 2018. This provides an opportunity for businesses to partner with the Government and Irish landowners and get behind the national effort to plant an additional 5 million native trees between now and 2020.

It is clear that we need all actors to participate in the national afforestation programme, which is why I very much welcome Coillte's recently announced Coillte Nature initiative. The primary objective of this initiative is to deliver new woodlands which provide species diversity, biodiversity, have carbon sequestration potential and can be used for enjoyment by the public. We have had active engagement with Coillte on this matter and now look forward to receiving applications for the conversion of a number of Coillte's commercial forests to native woodland, which may be funded under the Native Woodland Conservation Scheme. I am aware too that Coillte has started discussions with Bord na Mona in relation to possibilities for a joint venture to increase native forest cover on Bord na Mona lands, something which I am supportive of and hope will contribute to our afforestation targets.

My Department also operates a community based woodland scheme called the Neighbourwood scheme. This Scheme is designed to help community groups, in cooperation with local authorities, to develop opportunities for recreation while creating and developing woodlands for the benefit of current and future generations. The scheme is also designed to provide outdoor classrooms for teachers to show children the important contribution forests make to society in terms of social, economic and environmental benefits.

As can be seen, a range of approaches are being taken to address the challenge of increasing planting and especially the proportion of native and broadleaf planting. We will continue to offer generous grants and premiums to landowners to make the switch to forestry, we will use all avenues to promote and support that change, as well as supporting Coillte's endeavours and we will examine how forestry can be better integrated into the new CAP. I firmly believe that all of these measures will lead to an increase in our forestry land cover.

## **Beef Environmental Efficiency Scheme Pilot**

95. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the status of the roll-out of the beef environmental efficiency pilot; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28270/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot (BEEP) is an Exchequer funded, voluntary initiative of one year's duration.

The objective of BEEP is to further increase economic and environmental efficiency in the suckler herd through improvement in the quantity and quality of performance data that is collected. This will be done through the enhancement of the national herd dataset for genetic evaluations, with a view to supporting the adoption of best practice and more informed decision making at farm level. The Pilot targets the weaning efficiency of suckler cows and calves through the collection of the live weights of cows and progeny in the herd of each participant.

18,834 beef farmers applied to participate in the Pilot, and they will receive payment of up to €40 per eligible calf provided they comply with the requirements to weigh each animal and provide the requisite data to ICBF in accordance with the Terms and Conditions.

ICBF have been registering privately owned scales and accepting weight records from participating beef farmers since the 8th of March. 2,582 privately owned scales have been registered to date and, at the start of May, I welcomed the roll-out of rental scales that participants in the BEEP scheme can use to record cow and calf weights as part of the Pilot.

168 scales are currently available at some 73 locations and, in the coming days, we will see the final batch of scales distributed which will see a total of 400 scales available from Marts and Co Ops across the country. To date, in excess of 50,000 eligible calves have been weighed as part of the Pilot. Weight records can be submitted online, by dedicated form available from the ICBF or by using specially developed smartphone apps for Android and Apple devices that facilitate the quick and accurate submission of weighing data.

## **GLAS Administration**

96. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will address concerns of farmers on Killery mountain in respect of their participation in GLAS following the 2017 gorse fire; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28119/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Commonages make up approximately 422,000 hectares of the land area in Ireland, of which over 230,000 hectares is supported under GLAS. The aim of the Commonage action within GLAS is to ensure that commonage lands are appropriately grazed and managed and are compliant with eligibility criteria. The scheme requires that management plans are put into place in order to achieve this.

The Spring of 2017 was characterised by a spell of dry weather. It was apparent during the closed season for burning that there was widespread burning of growing vegetation. There were several high-profile fires such as in Killery, which impacted on the lands concerned and the local and wider environment.

The Department, in the administration of the Basic Payment Scheme, contacted 33 farmers in relation to ineligible land due to burning on Killery mountain. 29 of these farmers lodged

appeals with my Department on this issue. Where the applicant provided appropriate evidence that he/she was not involved in the burning of the affected lands, the administrative penalty was waived – however, the burnt land remained ineligible for payment.

Of the 29 cases that appealed, some 13 farmers submitted a further appeal to the Independent Agriculture Appeals office. Oral hearings were held between October 2018 and February 2019. No decision has been received to date on these appeals.

As per GLAS terms and conditions, farmers admitted to the scheme must submit a payment claim annually within the deadline for the submission of Basic Payment Scheme applications. For the purposes of GLAS, the annual payment claim forms part of the annual Basic Payment Scheme application. In these cases, as the claims have been reduced on the Basic Payment application, the GLAS payment is reduced in turn. As GLAS is a multi-annual scheme, this lower reference is retained for the duration of the GLAS contract. When the position regarding the Basic Payment Scheme is finalised, a decision can then be taken as to their GLAS scheme payments.

### **GLAS Data**

97. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the funding allocation amount for 2019 and actual expenditure to date for GLAS and the knowledge transfer group scheme in each year since it was established under the 2014-2020 RDP. [28226/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Green Low Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) is a measure funded by the Rural Development Programme. GLAS promotes practices to assist the preservation of habitats and species as well as addressing the issues of climate change mitigation and water quality, in support of sustainable Irish agriculture. Since the launch of GLAS tranche 1 in 2015, the Scheme has been extremely successful in terms of uptake with in excess of 50,000 farmers approved into the GLAS scheme over the first three tranches (GLAS 1, 2 and 3). The Rural Development Programme participation target of 50,000 was exceeded almost two years ahead of schedule.

Payment is then provided for selected actions, generally up to a maximum of €5,000 per annum for five years with provision for up to €7,000 (known as GLAS+) in a limited number of cases where the farmer is required to give exceptional environmental commitments.

In 2019 the allocation for GLAS (including GLAS training) is €203m. The expenditure so far in 2019 is €50.5m in terms of GLAS payments and €357,884 in respect of GLAS training. Currently over 95% of active participants have received their 2018 balancing payment meaning that they are fully up to date with payments. Those with outstanding actions have been advised of their requirements to be completed before they can receive their balancing payment. GLAS payments will continue to issue on a weekly basis as further participants pass the required validation checks. Payments in respect of the 2019 scheme year will commence in mid-November as per previous years.

The Knowledge Transfer Scheme is now in its third year. Under the scheme, participant farmers receive training in a group setting with their peers and subject matter experts in order to up-skill and inform farmers on best practice and new methods of farming to increase productivity and reduce costs etc. These groups are run by trained group facilitators (Agricultural Advisors).

€23m has been allocated to the scheme each calendar year while €20.73m and €18.59m

respectively were the expenditure amounts for the initial two years of the scheme. Year 3 payments will commence later in 2019.

### **Trade Agreements**

98. **Deputy Martin Kenny** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the position regarding the Mercosur deal; if support for the deal and other such trade deals that threaten the Irish agriculture sector will be withdrawn; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28158/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** On the evening of Friday 28 June, European Commissioner for Trade, Cecilia Malmström and Commissioner for Agriculture, Phil Hogan, announced that political agreement has been reached on a trade deal between the EU and Mercosur countries.

While as a small, open economy, Ireland is supportive of international trade deals, I am very concerned at the potential impact of elements of this particular deal on the beef sector.

The agreement includes a significant Tariff Rate Quota for South American beef, at a time when the beef sector in Europe is facing significant uncertainty because of Brexit. We have made concerted efforts over the full twenty-year history of these negotiations, working closely with other Member State colleagues and engaging directly with the European Commission, in order to minimise the EU offer in terms of beef, and while evidence of these efforts appears to have been reflected in the final offer, I am, nonetheless, deeply concerned at the potential impact on the Irish beef sector. There may be some opportunity for other agri-food sectors such as dairy and for the drinks industry, but we will need to examine the text carefully to assess the full impact.

It is also worth noting that this agreement will not come fully into effect for some years. It will first go through a process of legal scrubbing, which could take up to two years, before being put before the European Trade Council for ratification by Qualified Majority Vote, and the European Parliament.

If the agreement passes those hurdles, it is expected that the trade elements which fall under the EU Commission's competence, will be phased in over 6 years.

### **Brexit Staff**

99. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of the 116 staff and officials planned to be recruited for SPS and fisheries controls as agreed on 18 September 2018 that are operational; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28223/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department continues to participate actively in the Whole-of-Government approach to preparedness and contingency planning for Brexit. The Government sanctioned in the region of €4m for the commencement of a phased process for the recruitment of additional staff to carry out increased volumes of import controls and export certification arising from Brexit.

These requirements are significant, and arise in relation to the carrying out of documentary, identity and physical checks on imports of animals, plants, and products of animal and plant origin, as set out in EU legislation. My Department had previously carried out an extensive



analysis exercise, based on examination of trade and container movement data, to establish the potential volumes of controls that will need to be carried out. This exercise has been used to guide relevant planning in relation to putting in place the staff that will be required.

Regarding staffing requirements in the run up to potential Brexit deadlines in March and April, my Department sought to use a combination of recruitment, redeployment and temporary flexible solutions where appropriate and as necessary. My Department worked with our recruitment partners, the Public Appointments Service to engage Veterinary Inspectors, Portal Inspectors, Plant Health Inspectors and Administrative support staff. Mechanisms to temporarily redeploy experienced people within my Department were also initiated and the engagement of contracted temporary service arrangements was also progressed to address contingencies.

My Department will have up to 230 staff resources available for deployment across a range of disciplines in both front line control and back up administrative spheres.

Overall, I remain confident that my Department is in a position to deliver the services required in terms of both imports and exports at the appropriate time.

### **Departmental Staff Data**

100. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence the staff numbers in his Department by grade in each of the past ten years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28489/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** The information as requested by the Deputy is not immediately available, but is being compiled and will be sent to the Deputy at the earliest opportunity.

### **Defence Forces Equipment**

101. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Taoiseach and Minister for Defence if funding has been provided for the provision of replacement of Defence Forces MOWAGS armoured personnel carriers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28608/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Defence (Deputy Paul Kehoe):** My priority as Minister with Responsibility for Defence is to ensure that the operational capability of the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service, is maintained to the greatest extent possible to enable the Defence Forces to carry out their roles as assigned by Government.

The acquisition of new equipment and the upgrading of equipment for the Defence Forces remains a clear focus for me. Future equipment priorities for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service are considered in the context of the White Paper on Defence as part of the capability development and equipment priorities planning process. The principal aim over the period of the White Paper will be to replace and upgrade, as required, existing capabilities in order to retain a flexible response for a wide range of operational requirements both at home and overseas.

In accordance with the National Development Plan, the capital allocation for Defence has been increased to €106 million for 2019, an increase of €29 million. The National Development Plan provides for a total of €541 million for Defence over the period 2018-2022. This level of capital funding will allow the Defence Organisation to undertake a programme of sustained equipment replacement and infrastructural development across the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service as identified and prioritised in the Defence White Paper and builds on the significant



investment programme over recent years.

There is a focus on essential force protection by armoured vehicles, with a significant investment being made in the Army's fleet of 80 MOWAG Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs).

A multi year mid life upgrade maintenance and upgrade programme of the MOWAG APC fleet is well underway at a cost of €55m plus VAT, which will extend the utility of the fleet and provide greater levels of protection, mobility and firepower and will seek to ensure viability of the fleet out to 2030. The first 20 refurbished vehicles were delivered in 2018 and a further 20 refurbished vehicles are scheduled for delivery this year.

In addition, there has been further investment in the armoured fleet with the acquisition of 24 Armoured Utility Vehicles in 2017, and more recently the acquisition of 10 Combat Support Service Armoured 8 x 8 Drops Vehicles which were delivered in late 2018.

I am satisfied that the Defence Forces have the necessary resources available to them, including a modern and effective range of equipment which is line with best international standards in order to fulfil all roles assigned to them by Government.

### **Passport Applications**

102. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress to date in the determination of passport applications in the cases of persons (details supplied); when the application process has concluded and if successful, if the passports applied for through the Irish Embassy in Ottawa can be returned in one package to a person; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28330/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** One of the four applications referred to is for the renewal of an existing Irish passport and was submitted via the online renewal system.

The remaining three applications are paper-based applications which were submitted by the applicants to the Embassy in Ottawa on 26 June and are currently at the initial registration stage. These applications will be processed under the terms of the Passports Act 2008, which provides, inter alia, that only Irish citizens are entitled to hold Irish passports. Citizenship is determined by the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, 1956.

Due to a public holiday in Canada and the subsequent closure of the Embassy in Ottawa, it is not possible at this time to make enquiries as to the citizenship entitlement of the applicants who chose the paper-based route and to establish if all relevant information has been provided. The Passport Service will request that Embassy in Ottawa makes contact with the applicants, after the public holiday, to confirm that the applications have been made in the appropriate manner and are ready to be processed.

With regard to the query on the method by which passports will be returned to the applicants, it is important to note that online and paper based applications are processed differently.

Paper applications received at a mission are, after the appropriate checks have been completed by consular staff, processed and subsequently printed in Ireland before being sent back to the originating mission for dispatch to applicants.

The Passport Service is currently in its peak season for passport demand with the vast majority of applications being received between February and August each year. The current turn-

around time for paper applications submitted through our Missions is 37 working days plus postage time. The three paper applications, once processed, will be sent via the Embassy in Ottawa in one package to the address requested.

When applicants resident in Canada select the online renewal application channel, the passport is sent to the address specified by the applicant in their online application. This passport will not therefore be included in the package with the other three passports. Online passport applications are currently being processed within a turnaround time of 10 working days plus postage time.

The online passport renewal service is available to Irish citizens who have previously held an Irish passport which has not expired by more than five years. All applicants who are applying for a first Irish passport must continue to make a paper-based application.

### **Foreign Conflicts**

103. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the situation in Syria; the efforts being made by the EU and the international community to find a resolution to the conflict; the steps he is taking in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28386/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** Since 2011, the Syria conflict has cost the lives of well over 400,000 people. The Assad regime and its allies have repeatedly targeted civilians, through deliberate attacks, including chemical attacks, on civilian infrastructure such as homes, hospitals and schools, the use of “starve or surrender” techniques and the denial of humanitarian assistance, and forced displacement in the interest of demographic engineering. Other groups, most notably ISIS, have also perpetrated atrocities. Over 6 million people are displaced inside Syria, and a further 5.6 million have fled to neighbouring countries and the wider region. As the conflict enters its ninth year, nearly 12 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria, and more than 80 per cent of people live below the poverty line.

In recent months, there has been an escalation of the conflict in the north-west of Syria, in the area around Idlib and northern Hama. Conflict there between the regime and other armed groups has killed over 230 civilians, has displaced more than 330,000 people, and has left hundreds injured. I condemn in particular the airstrikes, including barrel bombs, that are reported to have deliberately targeted medical facilities and schools. Those with influence on the Syrian regime have a responsibility to exert pressure to ensure that civilians are protected, and to encourage the Syrian Government to engage fully with the UN-led peace process.

On 27 June 2019, EU High Representative Federica Mogherini issued a statement on behalf of the EU expressing deep concern over the situation in the north-west of Syria, strongly condemning the indiscriminate attacks on civilians, and calling on all sides to immediately cease hostilities, and to ensure the protection of, and unhindered humanitarian assistance, to the civilian population.

Ireland and the EU support the UN-led efforts to bring about a political resolution to the conflict, in accordance with the 2012 Geneva Communiqué and UN Security Council Resolution 2254. The UN Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, is currently focusing his efforts on establishing a constitutional committee, made up of Syrians of different political views, to chart the way forward for the country and unlock a broader political process. Such a process - which should be Syrian-led - will be essential to returning the country to stability. The UN Special

Envoy has been engaging directly with Russia, Turkey and Iran on this, and we believe that they have a responsibility to support and assist his efforts. The EU provides direct assistance to the Geneva peace talks and has launched, in coordination with the UN, an initiative to develop political dialogue with key actors from the region to identify common ground.

Ireland is a strong and consistent donor to the Syria crisis response and our overall funding supports those in need inside Syria as well as Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities in the region. In March 2019, Ireland pledged a further €25 million to the crisis, bringing the total amount of humanitarian assistance committed to the Syria crisis to over €143 million since 2012 – our largest ever response to any single crisis. To date, Ireland has disbursed €138m of this funding. Through its annual contributions to the EU Institutions, Ireland also supports the EU's humanitarian response in Syria.

Humanitarian aid will not solve the conflict, though it is important in mitigating its impact on ordinary people. Any sustainable solution to the Syrian conflict requires a genuine political transition, and at the EU-League of Arab States Ministerial meeting in February, I made this point to my EU and Arab counterparts. Ireland and the EU firmly believe that eight years of war have shown that military action cannot bring lasting peace to Syria.

## Human Rights

104. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has conveyed concern to the administration of the United States of America regarding the detention of children and the conditions they are being subjected to; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28387/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** I and my officials are aware of changes in US migration policy, which has seen an increase in the detention of child migrants, particularly along its southern border. We are also aware of reports on the conditions in which some migrant children and their families are being kept.

I have not specifically raised this issue with the US Administration; however, I and my officials hold regular and constructive discussions with US officials on a range of issues. The new US Ambassador to Ireland, Edward Crawford, has just arrived in Ireland and I look forward to discussing the full range of political issues with him in the near future.

Ireland, for its part, closely abides by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which we have ratified and which sets out clear universal standards and protections for all children.

Article 3 of the Convention states parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.

Article 9 of the Convention states parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child. Such determination may be necessary in a particular case such as one involving abuse or neglect of the child by the parents, or one where the parents are living separately and a decision must be made as to the child's place of residence.

I note with regret that the United States has signed the CRC but has not ratified it. Ireland

is supportive of the implementation of policies globally which live up to the values of the CRC and, in this regard, I hope the situation for migrant children and families, around the world, can be improved.

### **Human Rights**

105. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the status of the situation in Venezuela; the efforts being made by the EU and the international community to find a resolution to this situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28388/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The ongoing political, social, economic and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela continues to have a devastating effect on the Venezuelan population, and an ever-growing impact on the wider region. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organisation of Migration announced last month that the number of Venezuelans who have left the country since 2015 has now reached over 4 million.

The needs of the Venezuelan people are acute. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that 25% of the population, approximately 7 million people, are in need of humanitarian assistance. Health and medical needs are severe with many reported cases of diseases that had previously been eradicated or near eradication and a widespread lack of access to medicines and medical care. Ireland is fully supportive of the UN-coordinated response mechanism for humanitarian aid in the country, and of the €117 million in EU funding since 2018 for humanitarian assistance.

I am also deeply concerned by reported human rights abuses in Venezuela. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet painted a worrying picture of repression and a lack of respect for fundamental freedoms in the country after her visit last month. However, I welcome the engagement of the Government of Venezuela with the Office of High Commissioner Bachelet, and that the Government has agreed that a small team of human rights officers from the Office can be based in the country in order to provide technical assistance and advice, as well as to continue to monitor the human rights situation there. I would urge the Venezuelan authorities to cooperate fully with this team, and to allow them unrestricted access so that they can fully carry out their mandate.

The recent death of army captain Rafael Acosta Arévalo while in the custody of the Venezuelan security services further highlights the need for the human rights situation in the country to be addressed. It is another illustration of the arbitrary nature of the judicial system in the country and the lack of guarantees and rights for those under detention. I fully support the EU statement issued on 30 June that calls for a full and independent investigation into Captain Arévalo's death, and that highlights the EU's support for the efforts of High Commissioner Bachelet to ensure that the human rights of all Venezuelans are fully protected.

Captain Arévalo's death also underscores the urgency of the need to find a solution to this complex crisis. I continue to believe that this crisis can only have a political, peaceful, democratic solution, excluding the use of force, through the holding of free, transparent and credible Presidential elections as soon as possible.

The EU continues to work towards this goal, and Ireland fully supports the EU's International Contact Group's dual aims of finding a negotiated electoral path and of enabling the urgent delivery of humanitarian assistance. I also welcome the recent appointment by EU High

Representative Mogherini of an EU Special Adviser for Venezuela, Mr Enrique Iglesias. Special Adviser Iglesias will be well placed to engage with relevant stakeholders in Venezuela, and with international and regional actors, in the search for a peaceful solution to the crisis.

Ireland also welcomes the talks process between the Maduro administration and the opposition, facilitated by Norway, that is currently ongoing in Oslo. Ireland, along with the EU, stands ready to support this process. I fully support the statement released by High Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini on 18 June, which underlines the EU's support for this process and calls on all Venezuelan stakeholders to engage in this process in good faith and to pave the way for its success through concrete confidence-building measures.

### **Middle East Issues**

106. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the recent conference held in Bahrain to discuss Palestine and economic initiatives aimed at revitalising the region; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28389/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The United States introduced the economic element of their long awaited plan for the Middle East Peace Process, entitled Peace to Prosperity, at a meeting described as a workshop, which took place in Bahrain on 25-26 June. The published document sets out a range of possibilities for economic revitalisation and growth for Palestinians and the neighbouring countries, which could be achieved if the parties can agree a settlement of the conflict, and large scale international investment can be attracted to the region. Part of the purpose of the workshop, which was aimed primarily at Gulf Arab States, was to introduce the plan to such possible donors or investors. Ireland was not represented at the meeting.

I have always been clear in my view that an economic element can help support a well-thought out political solution, by setting out a vision of a post conflict situation in which all are winners. But as I have stated consistently, it is not possible to solve political problems by economic means alone. Support to the Palestinian people is of course always important and welcome. However, any potential investor or donor, public or private, will be very conscious that the main impediment to economic development for Palestinians, and the reason for the severe contraction of the Palestinian economy over the last two decades, is the web of restrictions due to the Israeli occupation. It is thus very difficult to discuss economic possibilities separate from the political context.

The EU has encouraged the US in its efforts to develop a peace plan, and Ireland has done this in all our contacts with the US Middle East team. It is my strong view that any plan must address the needs of both sides if it is to be successful. Preparing the ground can also be crucial to winning a considered hearing for any plan, and improved dialogue between the US team and Palestinian community and its leadership will be important in this regard.

### **Undocumented Irish in the USA**

107. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress to date in addressing the undocumented Irish in the United States of America; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28411/19]

**Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney):** The Taoiseach and I have prioritised the issue of Irish immigration in the US since taking office. We



will continue our efforts in this regard until we secure progress – both in terms of future legal immigration opportunities for Irish citizens, and also in securing a pathway for those Irish who are undocumented in order to regularise their status. Special Envoy to the US Congress on the Undocumented, John Deasy T.D., has also worked closely on these issues with my Department.

I visited the US in early February, for a series of engagements with the US Administration and Congressional leaders. I raised immigration issues in these meetings, as I have done in all my interactions with the US Administration and US political leaders since taking office. Additionally, the Taoiseach had a range of engagements at the highest levels of the US Administration and with Congressional leaders over the St Patrick's Day period.

In April, I was delighted to host events to mark the visit of the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, and to have the opportunity to discuss with her and the Congressional delegation a range of topics of mutual concern. Deputy Deasy also participated in the programme, as did officials from my Department. Through those events and meetings with the Taoiseach and Minister Donohoe, I believe the Speaker and delegation were fully briefed on Irish interests, including on immigration issues and our concerns for those Irish who are undocumented in the US.

These engagements have already borne fruit. I was pleased to note that an E3 Bill, which if passed, would offer new opportunities for Irish citizens to live and work in the US, was recently reintroduced into the US Congress. Much work still needs to be done for this Bill to become law, and we are under no illusions as to the challenging path ahead. Our Embassy in Washington, D.C. is focusing its efforts on securing the passage of this E3 Bill but we have also not lost sight of the issue of the undocumented Irish in America and the Government, as well as Irish officials across the US, continue to engage on this issue and advocate on behalf of this vulnerable community.

In addition to this work, my Department, including through our Embassy and Consulates in the US, work alongside the Irish Immigration Centres across the US on an ongoing basis to provide support to those Irish who are undocumented. Each Irish Centre receives significant Government funding through the Emigrant Support Programme for its work, including support for vulnerable Irish and the undocumented. In 2018, over €3 million was allocated to 76 organisations across the US, including the Irish Centres.

### **Primary Medical Certificates Eligibility**

108. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he is reviewing the eligibility criteria for the primary medical certificate; the status of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28324/19]

110. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he is reviewing the eligibility criteria for the disabled drivers and passengers tax concession scheme; the annual cost of the scheme; the status of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28325/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 108 and 110 together.

The Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers (Tax Concessions) Scheme provides relief from VAT and VRT (up to a certain limit) on the purchase of an adapted car for transport of a person with specific severe and permanent physical disabilities, payment of a Fuel Grant, and an exemption from Motor Tax.

To qualify for the Scheme an applicant must be in possession of a Primary Medical Certificate. To qualify for a Primary Medical Certificate, an applicant must satisfy one of the following conditions:

- be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both legs;
- be wholly without the use of one leg and almost wholly without the use of the other leg such that the applicant is severely restricted as to movement of the lower limbs;
- be without both hands or without both arms;
- be without one or both legs;
- be wholly or almost wholly without the use of both hands or arms and wholly or almost wholly without the use of one leg;
- have the medical condition of dwarfism and have serious difficulties of movement of the lower limbs.

The Scheme represents a significant tax expenditure. Between the Vehicle Registration Tax and VAT foregone, and the fuel grant, the scheme cost €65m in each of 2016 and 2017, rising to €70m in 2018. This figure does not include the revenue foregone in respect of the relief from Motor Tax provided to members of the Scheme.

I understand and fully sympathise with any person who suffers from a serious physical disability and can't access the scheme under the current criteria. However, given the scope and scale of the scheme, any possible changes to it can only be made after careful consideration, taking into account the existing and prospective cost of the scheme as well as the availability of other schemes which seek to help with the mobility of disabled persons, and the interaction between each of these schemes.

Accordingly, I have no plans to amend the qualifying medical criteria for the Disabled Drivers and Disabled Passengers Scheme at this time.

### **Tax Code**

109. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Finance his views on ticket taxes, kerosene levies and value added tax, respectively, on air travel; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28404/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The issue of aviation taxes is currently the subject of discussions amongst Member States and a matter for consideration by the European Commission in the context of its legislative right of initiative. We understand the context in which such discussions are taking place and Ireland will engage in any EU level discussions on this issue in a constructive manner.

*Question No. 110 answered with Question No. 108.*

### **Illegal Fuel Sales**

111. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Finance if consideration will be given to issues raised by organisations (details supplied) in relation to illicit trade and cross-Border smuggling, substantial financial loss to the Exchequer, serious difficulties created for small and

medium enterprises; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28372/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The threat that fuel fraud and the illicit tobacco trade pose to legitimate business, to consumers and the Exchequer is clear and I am assured by Revenue that combating such criminality continues to be a priority for them.

Steps taken by Revenue to combat the illegal fuel trade include the introduction of stringent supply chain controls and reporting requirements, and a rigorous programme of enforcement action. In addition, Revenue and the UK Revenue and Customs undertook a joint initiative to introduce a new marker for use in marked fuels, which came into operation from April 2015. Revenue have also conducted random National Sampling Programmes in the years 2016 to 2019, to assess the extent of fuel laundering. The industry view is that the actions taken have been successful in curtailing fuel fraud and the results of Revenue's sampling programmes support this view.

With regard to solid fuel, I indicated in a recent PQ response that I am advised that Revenue is in contact at present with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment to discuss the effectiveness of the regulatory regime for solid fuel, for which that Department has responsibility, and to explore how Revenue could support the Department to improve matters in light of continuing concerns that solid fuel sourced from Northern Ireland is getting onto the market here. I understand that contacts are ongoing with a view to undertaking a number of joint operations and to explore the scope for follow up action by Revenue in relation to persons found to be in breach of environmental regulations.

Revenue acts against all aspects of the illegal tobacco trade, and uses a combination of risk analysis, profiling and intelligence, and risk-based screening of cargo, vehicles, baggage and postal packages to intercept illicit products. Action after importation includes checks at retail outlets, markets and private and commercial premises.

Revenue and An Garda Síochána collaborate closely in acting against fuel and tobacco crime, and also cooperate closely with their counterparts in Northern Ireland, in the framework of the North-South Joint Agency Task Force. This cooperation plays a key role in targeting the organised crime groups responsible for much of this criminality, who operate across jurisdictions. Recent successes include the detection of an illegal cigarette factory in Jenkinstown, Co. Louth, in March 2018, as well as the detection of a second cigarette factory in Knockbridge, Co. Louth, in March 2019.

I am satisfied that Revenue's work against fuel fraud and the illicit tobacco trade has achieved a considerable level of success. For my part, I will fully consider any additional proposals for legislative change that may be brought forward by Revenue which would enhance its capacity to deal effectively with fraud and criminality in these areas.

### **Home Renovation Incentive Scheme**

112. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to reintroduce the home renovation incentive scheme; the other tax relief incentives that exist to homeowners to renovate properties, particularly rural dilapidated cottages; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28410/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The Home Renovation Incentive (HRI) was introduced by Section 477B of the Taxes Consolidation Act 1997 in 2014. I currently have no plans to re-introduce the scheme which terminated in accordance with its sunset clause on 31 December 2018.

Under my Department's Tax Expenditure Guidelines, the introduction of new tax incentive measures should only be considered in circumstances where there is a demonstrable market failure and where a tax based incentive is more efficient than a direct expenditure intervention.

The HRI was introduced at a time when there was considerable loss of employment within the construction sector, with the aim of addressing this market failure by stimulating increased activity in the sector. In the current context of a growing economy and construction sector, the initial objectives of the scheme have been fulfilled, and this support is no longer needed in the terms in which it was originally envisaged.

Furthermore, in light of the current housing supply shortage, and the need to deliver 25,000 additional housing units per annum over the period 2017-2021, there is a risk that a reintroduction of the HRI could lead to increased competition for scarce resources within the construction sector, leading to upward pressure on construction costs and house prices. The potential for displacement of labour from work on new builds to work on home renovations would create a high opportunity cost of labour associated with HRI which was not present at the inception of the scheme. As of 2 January 2019, the cost to the Exchequer of the HRI was c. €105 million, with a further €65 million worth of credits yet to be claimed in respect of the incentive. As the Deputy will appreciate, I must be mindful of the public finances and the many demands on the Exchequer; tax reliefs, no matter how worthwhile in themselves, lead to a narrowing of the tax base.

In relation the tax incentive measures for domestic owner-occupiers to renovate their properties, the Living City Initiative (ss.372AAA - 372AAD of the Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997) which applies to buildings constructed before 1915 located in special regeneration areas in the cities of Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kilkenny, Limerick or Waterford; and the Relief for expenditure on significant buildings and gardens (s.482 of the Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997) which applies to buildings which are of significant scientific, historical, architectural or aesthetic interest and to which reasonable access is afforded to the public, both provide such relief.

### **Property Tax Exemptions**

113. **Deputy Joan Burton** asked the Minister for Finance the number of households exempted from property tax by county in tabular form; when he expects the households exempted to become liable; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28447/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** The requested data, (the number of households exempted from property tax by county) as available at 31 December 2018 is set out in tabular form in Revenue's End of Year statistics report for the Local Property Tax, (available at [www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/lpt/local-property-tax-2018.pdf](http://www.revenue.ie/en/corporate/documents/statistics/lpt/local-property-tax-2018.pdf)) at page 8 of the document.

The various exemption types are generally open-ended. However, there are two that have a fixed statutory end date of 31 December 2019; i.e. certain properties purchased between 1 January 2013 and 31 December 2013 and trading stock of builder/developer sold in the period 1 January 2013 to 31 October 2019. The number of exemptions claimed is 11,700 and 5,200, respectively. These exemptions have their statutory basis in sections 8 and 9 Finance, respectively, (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended). In line with my decision to defer the revaluation date to 1 November 2020, all exemptions will be further extended to this date and any necessary legislative provisions will be introduced in due course in an amending LPT Bill.

There is a distinction to be made between (i) exempted properties, which have been detailed above, and (ii) properties built since 2013 which are not liable for LPT. The figures above do

not include properties completed after 1 May 2013. That category should be distinguished from those properties that were completed by 1 May 2013. The post 1 May 2013 completed properties do not have to be exempted from LPT as such, because they do not actually come within the ambit of LPT. As they did not exist on 1 May 2013, they will be outside the charge to LPT until the next valuation date of 1 November 2020. The owners of these properties are not required to submit LPT returns or valuations to Revenue, consequently their number is not known by Revenue and Revenue does not compile or publish statistics on these properties.

For the purposes of the LPT review, Revenue and the Dept. of Finance compiled estimates of the potential number of such properties from a combination of Revenue's Stamp Duty files, CSO data and other information. There are an estimated 60,000-80,000 such properties, depending on the time period being examined.

### **Tax Code**

114. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Finance the rules in relation to inheritance tax and in particular provisions to address a situation for two siblings living in the same house; if there is specific relief for dealing with the cash and assets other than the house between them (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28503/19]

**Minister for Finance (Deputy Paschal Donohoe):** I am informed by Revenue that it is not possible to be definitive about the inheritance tax position in this case given the absence of specific information.

For inheritance tax purposes, the relationship between the person who provides the inheritance (i.e. the disponer) and the person who receives the inheritance (i.e. the beneficiary) determines the life-time tax-free threshold - known as the Group threshold, below which inheritance tax does not arise. It seems that the question may relate to a potential future inheritance passing between siblings, in which case, the Group B threshold (currently €32,500) which applies, inter alia, where the beneficiary is a brother or sister of the disponer would be relevant.

Any prior gift or inheritance received by a beneficiary since 5 December 1991 from within the same Group threshold is aggregated for the purposes of determining whether any tax is payable on a benefit. Where a person receives inheritances that are in excess of his or her relevant tax-free threshold, inheritance tax at a rate of 33% applies on the excess over the tax-free threshold.

While there are no specific reliefs provided for siblings living together, they may bequeath assets to each other free from inheritance tax provided the value of the assets does not exceed the relevant tax-free Group thresholds when previous gifts and bequests to the individual are considered.

In addition, siblings can avail of the 'dwelling house exemption' to bequeath their principal private residence to another sibling which allows for property to be inherited tax-free irrespective of its value subject to certain conditions. The main conditions are that the beneficiary must have lived in the house that was the sole residence of the disponer for at least three year prior to the inheritance and for six years after the inheritance and must not have an interest in any other house



115. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if funding will be provided for the development of Nenagh Castle and surrounds; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28373/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** Nenagh Castle has already been fully conserved and is open to the public, so no further investment is therefore required in the historic building in the short term.

The question of rehabilitation and adaptation of the nearby two derelict houses on Pearse St. is currently under review in the context of future tourism development of the entire historic town quarter and once an appropriate strategy in relation to this has been agreed, an appropriate funding source will be identified and resources sought, since OPW has no monies available to it currently for any project at the site.

### Garda Station Refurbishment

116. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the refurbishment works the OPW carried out at Garda stations in the Roscommon-Longford Garda division in which the value of works was in excess €5,000 in 2018 and to date in 2019; the works carried out at each station; if the refurbishment works are completed or still ongoing; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28603/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran):** I can confirm that the Office of Public Works has carried out refurbishment works valued at greater than €5000 in seven Garda Stations in the Roscommon Longford Division in 2018 and 2019. Details of these works are given in the table. All of these works are complete and included works funded by both the Office of Public Works and An Garda Síochána.

Garda Station	Description	Year
Boyle GS, Co Roscommon	Heating upgrade works	2018
Boyle GS, Co Roscommon	Roof works	2019
Athleague GS, Co Roscommon	Radon remedial works	2018
Athleague GS, Co Roscommon	Works to the boundary wall	2019
Strokestown GS, Co Roscommon	Flood repair works	2018
Roscommon GS, Co Roscommon	Replacement window works	2018
Roscommon GS, Co Roscommon	Installation of automatic gates	2019
Granard GS, Co Longford	Interior decoration	2018
Granard GS, Co Longford	Electrical works	2018
Smear GS, Co Longford	Roof works	2019
Longford GS, Co Longford	General refurbishment works	2018
Longford GS, Co Longford	Works to the boundary wall	2019

### Apprenticeship Data

117. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 will receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017; if he will seek equality of allowances for all apprenticeships in Budget 2020; the estimated cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28614/19]

118. **Deputy Jan O’Sullivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprenticeships developed since 2017; the number of apprentices enrolled per apprenticeship programme developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28615/19]

119. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 will receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017; the number of new apprenticeships developed since 2017; the number of apprentices enrolled per apprenticeship programme developed since 2017; if equality of allowances will be sought for all apprenticeships in Budget 2020; the estimated cost in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28622/19]

120. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 will receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28629/19]

121. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprenticeships developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28630/19]

122. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprentices enrolled per apprenticeship programme developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28631/19]

123. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if equality of allowances for all apprenticeships will be sought in Budget 2020; the estimated cost for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28673/19]

124. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprentices enrolled by apprenticeship programme developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28674/19]

125. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprenticeships developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28675/19]

126. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 will receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28676/19]

131. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if equality of allowances for all apprenticeships in Budget 2020 will be allowed; the estimated cost in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28745/19]

132. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprenticeships developed since 2017 to date; the number of apprentices enrolled per apprenticeship programme developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28746/19]

133. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 will receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28748/19]

134. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28789/19]

135. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if equality of allowances for all apprenticeships will be sought in Budget 2020; the estimated cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28790/19]

136. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 will receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28842/19]

137. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprenticeships developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28843/19]

138. **Deputy Catherine Connolly** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprentices enrolled per apprenticeship programme developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28844/19]

139. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 will receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017. [28849/19]

140. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprenticeships developed since 2017. [28850/19]

141. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprentices enrolled per apprenticeship programme developed since 2017. [28851/19]

142. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if equality of allowances will be sought for all apprenticeships in Budget 2020; the estimated cost in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28852/19]

143. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 will receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017. [28863/19]

144. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprenticeships developed since 2017. [28864/19]

145. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprentices enrolled per apprenticeship programme developed since 2017. [28865/19]

146. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if equality of allowances will be sought for all apprenticeships in Budget 2020; and the estimated cost in this regard. [28866/19]

147. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of

apprentices developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29128/19]

148. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 will receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29172/19]

149. **Deputy John Brassil** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprentices enrolled per apprenticeship programme developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29170/19]

150. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprentices enrolled per apprenticeship programme developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29138/19]

151. **Deputy Joe Carey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 will receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29136/19]

152. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 will receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29127/19]

153. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprentices enrolled per apprenticeship programme developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29129/19]

154. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 will receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29124/19]

155. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 will receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017; the number of new apprenticeships developed since 2017; the number of apprentices enrolled per apprenticeship programme developed since 2017; if he will consider equality of allowances for all apprenticeships in Budget 2020; the cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29154/19]

156. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprentices enrolled per apprenticeship programme developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29236/19]

157. **Deputy Willie O’Dea** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if equality of allowances for apprenticeships will be sought in Budget 2020; the estimated cost in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29239/19]

158. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new apprenticeship programmes since 2017 will receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29282/19]

159. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number

of new apprenticeships developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29283/19]

160. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprentices enrolled per apprenticeship programme developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29284/19]

161. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if equality of allowances will be sought for apprenticeships in Budget 2020; the estimated cost in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29285/19]

162. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 will receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29290/19]

163. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprenticeships developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29291/19]

164. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprentices enrolled per apprenticeship programme developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29292/19]

165. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if equality of allowances will be sought for apprenticeships in Budget 2020; the estimated cost in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [29293/19]

175. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 are and will receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017. [28483/19]

176. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprenticeship courses developed since 2017; and the number of apprentices enrolled by year. [28484/19]

177. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will seek equality of allowances for all apprenticeships in the forthcoming Budget; and if so, the estimated cost of same. [28485/19]

178. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 will receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017; the number of new apprenticeships developed since 2017; the number of apprentices enrolled per apprenticeship programme developed since 2017; if equality of allowances for all apprenticeships in Budget 2020 will be considered; the estimated cost as a result; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28493/19]

180. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 will receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28497/19]

181. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprenticeships developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28498/19]



182. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprentices enrolled per apprenticeship programme developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28499/19]

183. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if equality of allowances for all apprenticeships will be provided in Budget 2020; the estimated cost for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28500/19]

184. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 will receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28504/19]

185. **Deputy Fergus O'Dowd** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a reply will issue to correspondence from an association (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28508/19]

186. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprenticeships developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28510/19]

187. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprentices enrolled per apprenticeship programme developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28511/19]

188. **Deputy James Browne** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will seek for equality of allowances for all apprenticeships in Budget 2020; the estimated cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28512/19]

192. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 will receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28542/19]

193. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprenticeships developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28543/19]

194. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprentices enrolled per apprenticeship programme developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28544/19]

195. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if equality of allowances for all apprenticeships will be sought in Budget 2020; the estimated cost for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28545/19]

196. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 will receive the same allowances for apprentices attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28546/19]

197. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprenticeships developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28547/19]

198. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number

of apprentices enrolled per apprenticeship programme developed since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28548/19]

199. **Deputy Michael Fitzmaurice** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if equality of allowances for all apprenticeships will be introduced in Budget 2020; the estimated cost for same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28549/19]

200. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprentices that have participated on each apprenticeship programme since 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28570/19]

201. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017; his plans to roll out more programmes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28571/19]

202. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the new apprenticeship programmes rolled out since 2017 will have the same allowances as apprentices attending college; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28572/19]

203. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to introduce similar allowances for all apprenticeships; if so, the estimated cost for such allowances; the estimated additional costs that will be incurred in ensuring equality of allowances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28573/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 117 to 126, inclusive, 131 to 165, inclusive, 175 to 178, inclusive, 180 to 188, inclusive, and 192 to 203, inclusive, together.

This Government is committed to the ongoing expansion and development of our national apprenticeship system, as is evident by a year on year increase in the budget allocation. This year's allocation for apprenticeship training is €142m which represents an increase of over 16% on the 2018 allocation of €122m. Since 2015 new apprenticeship registrations have increased by 80% with 5,648 new registrations by the end of 2018. In addition, following two calls for proposals in 2015 and 2017 by the Apprenticeship Council, to date twenty new apprenticeship programmes have been developed and are now operational to complement the existing 25 craft apprenticeships.

These include three chef apprenticeships in the hospitality sector in the occupations of commis chef, chef de partie and sous chef. A further programme in the occupation of executive chef is also in development and due to be rolled out in 2020.

It is important to note that the structure of these new consortia led apprenticeship programmes are different to those in the craft trades. Our new consortia-led apprenticeships offer more flexibility to employers in meeting their skill needs both in the duration of the programme and in terms of the delivery of the off-the-job training. These new apprenticeship programmes vary in length from 2 to 4 years and have different methods of off-the-job training such as one day per week, as is the case with the chef apprenticeships, and on-line blended learning rather than the traditional block release of up to 22 weeks in an education setting, as is the case in the craft trades. While there is no training allowance paid to apprentices undertaking one of our new apprenticeships, I am aware that some employers engaged in the system have raised this as an issue. However, any change in this regard, which has not yet been costed by the Department, would have to form part of the normal budgetary process and be considered in the broader context of competing demands and the overall availability of resources.

In addition to the apprenticeship programmes, there are a range of other programmes avail-

able in the hospitality area across further education and training and higher education settings. Similarly, there are employer-led training supported through Skillnet Ireland, such as the Restaurant and Hospitality Skillnet, which was established in 2017, and the Taste 4 Success Skillnet to address skill needs in the sector.

Details of apprentice population per apprenticeship programme as requested by the deputy are set out in the following tabular statement.

Apprentice Population				
20 New Apprenticeships developed Since 2016	2016	2017	2018	2019*
AUCTIONEERING				
Auctioneering & property services	n/a	n/a	52	58
Total			52	58
BIOPHARMACHEM				
Laboratory Analyst	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Laboratory Technician	n/a	n/a	14	15
Total	n/a	n/a	14	15
Electrical				
Industrial Electrical Engineering	12	31	54	58
Total	12	31	54	58
ENGINEERING				
Manufacturing Engineering (Level 6)	n/a	39	73	75
Manufacturing Engineering (Level 7)	n/a	36	55	55
Polymer Processing Technology	n/a	23	38	42
Original Equipment and Manufacture (OEM)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	n/a	98	166	172
FINANCE				

Apprentice Population				
20 New Apprenticeships developed Since 2016	2016	2017	2018	2019*
Accounting Technician	n/a	71	146	175
Insurance Practitioner	67	138	197	190
International Financial Services Associate	n/a	14	25	27
International Financial Services Specialist	n/a	14	24	24
Total	67	237	392	416
FOOD MANUFACTURING				
Butcher	n/a	n/a	7	14
Total	n/a	n/a	7	14
HOSPITALITY				
Chef de Partie	n/a	n/a	27	28
Commis Chef	n/a	25	105	91
Sous Chef	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	n/a	25	132	119
ICT				
ICT Associate Professional Network Technician	n/a	n/a	22	51
ICT Associate Professional Software Developer	n/a	n/a	38	63
Cybersecurity Associate	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	n/a	n/a	60	114
LOGISTICS				
Logistics Associate	n/a	n/a	27	27
Grand Total	79	391	904	993

\* Latest figure as of the 31st May 2019

### Apprenticeship Data

127. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if all new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017 will receive the same allowances for apprentices

attending college as apprenticeships developed prior to 2017; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28680/19]

128. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of new apprenticeship programmes developed since 2017; the number of apprentices that participated and completed these new apprenticeships; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28681/19]

129. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the number of apprentices enrolled per apprenticeship programme developed since 2017, in tabular form. [28682/19]

130. **Deputy Mary Butler** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his plans to seek equality of allowances for all apprenticeships in Budget 2020; the estimated cost of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28683/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 127 to 130, inclusive, together.

This Government is committed to the ongoing expansion and development of our national apprenticeship system, as is evident by a year on year increase in the budget allocation. This year's allocation for apprenticeship training is €142m which represents an increase of over 16% on the 2018 allocation of €122m. Since 2015 new apprenticeship registrations have increased by 80% with 5,648 new registrations by the end of 2018. In addition, following two calls for proposals in 2015 and 2017 by the Apprenticeship Council, to date twenty new apprenticeship programmes have been developed and are now operational to complement the existing 25 craft apprenticeships.

These include three chef apprenticeships in the hospitality sector in the occupations of commis chef, chef de partie and sous chef. A further programme in the occupation of executive chef is also in development and due to be rolled out in 2020.

It is important to note that the structure of these new consortia led apprenticeship programmes are different to those in the craft trades. Our new consortia-led apprenticeships offer more flexibility to employers in meeting their skill needs both in the duration of the programme and in terms of the delivery of the off-the-job training. These new apprenticeship programmes vary in length from 2 to 4 years and have different methods of off-the-job training such as one day per week, as is the case with the chef apprenticeships, and on-line blended learning rather than the traditional block release of up to 22 weeks in an education setting, as is the case in the craft trades. While there is no training allowance paid to apprentices undertaking one of our new apprenticeships, I am aware that some employers engaged in the system have raised this as an issue. However, any change in this regard, which has not yet been costed by the Department, would have to form part of the normal budgetary process and be considered in the broader context of competing demands and the overall availability of resources.

In addition to the apprenticeship programmes, there are a range of other programmes available in the hospitality area across further education and training and higher education settings. Similarly, there are employer-led training supported through Skillnet Ireland, such as the Restaurant and Hospitality Skillnet, which was established in 2017, and the Taste 4 Success Skillnet to address skill needs in the sector.

As the new consortia led apprenticeships are ongoing and have not reached completion stage, we do not have a comprehensive database of completion figures. This information will be recorded once submitted by the apprenticeship consortia. Details of apprentice population per apprenticeship programme as requested by the deputy are set out in the following tabular



statement.

## Apprentice Population

20 New Apprenticeships developed Since 2016	2016	2017	2018	2019*
AUCTIONEERING				
Auctioneering & property services	n/a	n/a	52	58
Total			52	58
BIOPHARMACHEM				
Laboratory Analyst	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Laboratory Technician	n/a	n/a	14	15
Total	n/a	n/a	14	15
Electrical				
Industrial Electrical Engineering	12	31	54	58
Total	12	31	54	58
ENGINEERING				
Manufacturing Engineering (Level 6)	n/a	39	73	75
Manufacturing Engineering (Level 7)	n/a	36	55	55
Polymer Processing Technology	n/a	23	38	42
Original Equipment and Manufacture (OEM)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	n/a	98	166	172
FINANCE				
Accounting Technician	n/a	71	146	175
Insurance Practice	67	138	197	190
International Financial Services Associate	n/a	14	25	27
International Financial Services Specialist	n/a	14	24	24
Total	67	237	392	416
FOOD MANUFACTURING				

20 New Apprenticeships developed Since 2016	2016	2017	2018	2019*
Butcher	n/a	n/a	7	14
Total	n/a	n/a	7	14
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>				
Chef de Partie	n/a	n/a	27	28
Commis Chef	n/a	25	105	91
Sous Chef	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	n/a	25	132	119
<b>ICT</b>				
ICT Associate Professional Network Technician	n/a	n/a	22	51
ICT Associate Professional Software Developer	n/a	n/a	38	63
Cybersecurity Associate	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	n/a	n/a	60	114
<b>LOGISTICS</b>				
Logistics Associate	n/a	n/a	27	27
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>904</b>	<b>993</b>

\* Latest figure as of the 31st May 2019

*Questions Nos. 131 to 139, inclusive, answered with Question No. 117.*

*Questions Nos. 140 to 165 answered with Question No. 117.*

### School Staff

166. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a DEIS primary school (details supplied) will not lose a teacher in the forthcoming academic year in view of the exceptional circumstances of the case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28304/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided at individual school level is the staffing schedule for the relevant school year and pupil enrolments on the previous 30th September.

The school referred to by the Deputy is due to have one teaching post suppressed due to a fall in enrolments in September 2018.

The staffing process includes an appeals mechanism for schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain criteria to an independent Appeals Board. It is open to Boards of Management to assess the criteria which best applies to their school and submit an appeal to the Primary Staffing Appeals Board. To date, the Department has not received a staffing appeal from the school referred to by the Deputy.

Circular 0019/2019, "Staffing Arrangements in Primary Schools for the 2019/20 School

Year” provides details for schools wishing to make an appeal.

### **School Accommodation Provision**

167. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of an application by a school (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28332/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** I can confirm that my Department received an application in March 2019 for a general purpose room from the school referred to by the Deputy.

The immediate priority of my Department is providing 20,000 new and replacement school places each year, to ensure that every child has a school place.

As the Deputy is aware my Department is committed to a PE Hall build and modernisation programme, starting in the second half of the Project Ireland 2040 period (2018 -2027), that ensures that students in all post-primary schools have access to state of the art facilities to support PE provision, particularly also in the context of the roll-out of P.E. as a leaving certificate subject.

The school authority has been informed of the outcome of their application.

### **Education and Training Boards**

168. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of a project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28380/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The proposed development of Shielbaggan Outdoor Centre on Forth Mountain, County Wexford is by means of a partnership between Waterford and Wexford ETB and Wexford County Council.

The Forth Mountain Outdoor Education and Training Centre referred to by the Deputy is being purpose built by Wexford County Council and there has been consultation between Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board and the local authority on this project.

My Department is not directly involved in the building project but we have received a copy of the proposal from the ETB to relocate the services and facilities of Shielbaggan Outdoor Education and Training Centre to this new facility, and this is currently under review.

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

169. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the case of a child (details supplied) with special needs who will be five years of age in July 2019 and has no appropriate school place for September; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28385/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** It is the policy of my Department that all children with Special Educational Needs, including those with Autism, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is an independent statutory body whose functions include planning and co-ordinating the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs in conjunction with schools and the Health Service Executive (HSE). Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs are available by county on the NCSE website [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

The NCSE, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas where there is an identified need. The NCSE is aware of emerging need from year to year and where special provision is required it is planned and established to meet that need.

The enrolment of a child in a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parents of the child and then a matter for the school/ Board of Management having regard to their own enrolment/admissions policy. The Department and the NCSE has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment to schools.

It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998. The criteria to be applied by schools in such circumstances is a matter for the schools themselves. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. Under section 15 (2) (d) of the Education Act 1998, each school is legally obliged to publish its enrolment policy.

Section 29 of the Education Act 1998, provides parents with an appeal process where a board of management of a school or a person acting on behalf of the Board refuses enrolment to a student. Where a school refuses to enrol a pupil, the school is obliged to inform parents of their right under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 to appeal that decision to either the relevant Educational Training Board or to the Secretary General of the Department.

Parents/guardians who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement should contact their local Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) who can assist in identifying an appropriate educational placement for their child. Contact details are available on [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

The NCSE also works in collaboration with the Educational Welfare Services (EWS) of the Child and Family Agency which is the statutory agency that can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child or can offer assistance where a child is out of school. The local service is delivered through the national network of Educational Welfare Officers (EWO). Contact details are available at <http://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/education-and-welfare/>.

Where there is no placement available for a child with Special Educational Needs, the Department will consider applications under the Home Tuition Grant Scheme, where a student can receive up to 20 hours home tuition per week as an interim measure until a placement becomes available. The availability of a school placement is assessed by the NCSE having regard to, although not limited to, the relevant diagnosis and relevant professional report.

Accordingly, the NCSE advises parents, to seek to enrol their child, by applying in writing, to the school/s of their choice as early as possible. Where parents have been unsuccessful in enrolling their child in a school, they should update their local SENO to inform the planning process.

As the matter raised by the Deputy refers to a particular child, I have arranged for the Deputy's question to be forwarded to the National Council for Special Education for their attention.

and direct reply.

### **Schools Building Projects**

170. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the policy under review for hiring clerks of works on additional accommodation schemes will be concluded; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28390/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** The Deputy will be aware that it is standard practice that a Clerk of Works is appointed on all major school building projects when the project is progressing to site. The current position with respect to Additional Accommodation projects is that a Clerk of Works is provided where warranted based particularly on the scope and scale of the relevant project. Requests for same are and will continue to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

### **National Training Fund**

171. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount of revenue collected by the national training fund levy in each of the years 2000 to 2018 and to date in 2019; the amount spent from the national training fund in each of the years 2000 to 2018 and to date 2019, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28391/19]

172. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the amount in the national training fund, including funds held in reserve and carried over from underspends in previous years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28392/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 171 and 172 together.

The National Training Fund (NTF) comprises part of the overall annual expenditure ceiling for the Department of Education and Skills. On that basis NTF spending is subject to the EU expenditure rule which as the Deputy will be aware is designed to ensure that growth in public expenditure is sustainable and supports the achievement of key fiscal targets.

There has been very substantial growth in NTF spending in recent years on the basis of the +0.1% increase in the Training Levy in both 2018 and 2019 with expenditure increasing by €58m (16%) and €69m (17%) respectively. This has supported a very significant expansion in NTF priorities.

The NTF currently supports 18,000 apprentices; 42,000 jobseekers looking for work; 5,000 trainees; 31,000 students in enterprise; 9,247 Springboard courses; 62,000 places on courses to meet skills gaps; and upskilling another 5,000 workers.

As detailed in the National Training Fund Expenditure Report 2019 published last week, €485m is being invested in programmes in 2019 which meet skills needs in the economy, support unemployed people in their journey back to work and assist those in employment to acquire new skills. This includes the expansion of the apprenticeship and traineeship schemes, additional investment in Springboard and additional support to increase skills for those in employment through Skillnet Ireland.

The surplus in the NTF at the end of 2018 amounted to €473m. The accumulated surplus in the NTF has previously been critical in maintaining expenditure levels, particularly in the



provision of training for the unemployed, in recession years when NTF income declined. It is clearly prudent to continue to maintain an adequate surplus in the Fund to meet demand in future years and while the surplus represents a very significant amount, it would only cover twelve month's NTF expenditure at current levels.

A further increase in NTF spending estimated at €70m approximately is expected to take place in 2020 on the basis of the further +0.1% increase in the Training Levy.

This will be supplemented in 2020 by €60m investment in the Human Capital Initiative (HCI) also funded from the NTF announced in Estimates 2019. The HCI is a 5-year programme of increased investment in priority skills in higher education amounting to €300m over the period 2020 - 2024.

Details in relation to NTF income and expenditure in each of the years from 2000 to date as requested by the Deputy are in the table. The Deputy should note that NTF accounts for 2001 include the period from the NTF's establishment on 21 December 2000 to 31 December 2001.

Year	Income from National Training Fund Levy	Total Expenditure from fund
2001	187,921,236	168,941,224
2002	239,000,000	204,583,430
2003	250,000,000	233,722,861
2004	273,000,000	276,678,337
2005	327,000,000	312,738,093
2006	366,000,000	352,718,974
2007	408,000,000	394,589,181
2008	413,000,000	399,146,178
2009	372,000,000	366,482,465
2010	309,000,000	395,221,768
2011	316,000,000	326,269,322
2012	299,000,000	340,896,121
2013	317,000,000	348,804,784
2014	338,000,000	346,906,382
2015	364,000,000	334,210,109
2016	390,000,000	344,399,000
2017	431,000,000	357,230,000
2018	565,500,000	415,394,000
To June 2019	356,000,000	231,793,087

### Schools Building Contractors

173. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the timeline for the construction of the permanent building for a school (details supplied) in view of the fact that planning permission has been granted; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28437/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Permanent accommodation for the school referred to by the Deputy is being delivered under the Department's Design & Build Programme. This delivery programme uses a professional Project Manager to progress the project through the relevant stages of architectural planning and construction.

The brief for this project is to provide a 16 classroom primary school with a 2 classroom special educational needs unit.

A planning application for the project was lodged in January 2019. Additional information sought by the local authority was provided and a notification of decision to grant planning permission was received on 24th May 2019. The final grant of planning permission will enable the project to proceed to tender after the tender documentation is finalised. It is intended that the project will proceed to tender in the coming weeks and a contractor will be appointed to commence work in quarter 4 of 2019.

### **Schools Building Projects Status**

174. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of a school building project (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28453/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** As the Deputy may be aware, agreement in principle has been reached with the vendor for the acquisition of a site at Clonard, Co. Wexford. This site is proposed to facilitate the permanent accommodation needs of the school to which he refers. Work is progressing and is ongoing in respect of technical matters on the acquisition

In the meantime, I can inform the Deputy that the school project in question is being devolved for delivery to Waterford and Wexford ETB (WWETB).

My Department will shortly be making the necessary arrangements to enter into a Service Level Agreement with WWETB in that respect. This is the first step to initiate the delivery of the project. Thereafter, the ETB will procure a design team for the project to design the buildings, obtain the necessary statutory planning permissions and move the project onward to construction in due course.

*Questions Nos. 175 to 178, inclusive, answered with Question No. 117.*

### **Third Level Institutions**

179. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will engage with a college (details supplied) in County Tipperary that wishes to provide a course for the provision of home economics teachers in view of the fact that the only course nationally is based in County Sligo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28496/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My Department is currently considering a submission in relation to the provision of a Home Economics Programme in the Higher Education Institution (HEI) referred to by the Deputy.

I wish to advise the Deputy that any decision made by my Department on this issue will need to take into account a number of factors including Teacher Supply and the availability of Capital Funding.

Once the submission has been fully considered my Department will respond directly to the HEI. It is expected that a full response will issue in the coming weeks.

*Questions Nos. 180 to 188, inclusive, answered with Question No. 117.*

### **School Transport**

189. **Deputy Paul Kehoe** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if an extension to a school bus route (details supplied) is under consideration; if so, when the outcome will be decided; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28514/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy John Halligan):** School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department.

The purpose of my Department's School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

There are currently over 117,500 children, including over 13,000 children with special educational needs, transported in over 5,000 vehicles on a daily basis to primary and post-primary schools throughout the country covering over 100 million kilometres annually.

Bus Éireann is responsible for the planning and timetabling of school transport routes. Bus Éireann endeavours, within available resources, to ensure that each eligible child has a reasonable level of school transport service in the context of the Scheme nationally.

Bus Éireann has advised that the service in question is operated by a 53 seater vehicle and it is not possible to extend this service as the road is too narrow for a large vehicle to traverse. Bus Éireann has advised that the pick-up point referred to by the Deputy has been assessed as being suitable as a pick-up point under the School Transport Scheme.

Parents are responsible for ensuring that children are brought safely to and collected safely from Bus Éireann designated pick up and set down points.

The terms of the scheme are applied equitably and on a national basis.

### **Student Universal Support Ireland Expenditure**

190. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason €2 million less was spent on the SUSI grant in 2019. [28522/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** In the published Revised Estimates Volume (REV) for 2019, the allocation for student support and related expenditure is €404,450,000. This figure will cover costs associated with SUSI grants and related activities plus expenditure on other access related activities to support various disadvantaged initiatives such as the Student Assistance Fund (SAF), the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) and the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH).

The Deputy will be aware that the SUSI grant scheme, SAF and FSD are all demand led schemes and expenditure can vary from year to year, depending on demand. The figures for SUSI grants are not yet finalised for 2018/19 however, to date circa 79,500 students have been assessed as eligible for SUSI grant support. The latest academic year that statistics are available for the SAF and FSD is 2017/18 and in that year almost 27,500 students received supports from these schemes. It is anticipated that similar numbers of students will qualify for support under the three schemes in 2019/20.

As in previous years, the level of expenditure and demand on each of the schemes will re-

main under review throughout the year. It is anticipated that the 2019 REV allocation will meet the anticipated demand on the various schemes for which funding has been provided.

### **Student Grant Scheme Eligibility**

191. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the income thresholds for the SUSI grant will rise in 2020 to make it more accessible for students and families. [28523/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** Under the terms of the student grant scheme, grant assistance is awarded to students who meet the prescribed conditions of funding including those which relate to nationality, residency, approved course, previous academic attainment and means.

The eligibility criteria for student grants including the income thresholds reviewed annually in my Department and approved by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. As the Deputy will be aware, all proposals made in relation to education expenditure, including changes to income thresholds, will be considered in the context of the Budget 2020.

The aim of the student grant scheme has always been to make a contribution to the cost of going to college, covering the full cost has never been a feasible option.

Students in third-level institutions experiencing exceptional financial need can apply for support under the Student Assistance Fund. This Fund assists students, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, who might otherwise be unable to continue their third level studies due to their financial circumstances. Information on the fund is available through the Access Office in the third level institution attended. This fund is administered on a confidential, discretionary basis.

*Questions Nos. 192 to 203, inclusive, answered with Question No. 117.*

### **Special Educational Needs Service Provision**

204. **Deputy Darragh O'Brien** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the status of the provision of a special school place for a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28574/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** It is the policy of my Department that all children with Special Educational Needs can have access to an education appropriate to their needs, preferably in school settings through the primary and post primary school network.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) is an independent statutory body whose functions include planning and co-ordinating the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs in conjunction with schools and the Health Service Executive (HSE). Details of all special classes for children with special educational needs are available by county on the NCSE website [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

The NCSE, through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs), is responsible for the establishment of special classes in various geographical areas where there is an identified need. The NCSE is aware of emerging need from year to year and where special provision is required it is planned and established to meet that need.

The enrolment of a child in a school is a matter, in the first instance, for the parents of the child and then a matter for the school/ Board of Management having regard to their own enrolment/admissions policy. The Department and the NCSE has no role in relation to processing applications for enrolment to schools.

It is the responsibility of the managerial authorities of all schools to implement an enrolment policy in accordance with the Education Act, 1998. The criteria to be applied by schools in such circumstances is a matter for the schools themselves. This selection process and the enrolment policy on which it is based must be non-discriminatory and must be applied fairly in respect of all applicants. Under section 15 (2) (d) of the Education Act 1998, each school is legally obliged to publish its enrolment policy.

Section 29 of the Education Act 1998, provides parents with an appeal process where a board of management of a school or a person acting on behalf of the Board refuses enrolment to a student. Where a school refuses to enrol a pupil, the school is obliged to inform parents of their right under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 to appeal that decision to either the relevant Educational Training Board or to the Secretary General of the Department.

Parents/guardians who may need advice or are experiencing difficulties in locating a school placement should contact their local Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) who can assist in identifying an appropriate educational placement for their child. Contact details are available on [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie).

The NCSE also works in collaboration with the Educational Welfare Services (EWS) of the Child and Family Agency which is the statutory agency that can assist parents who are experiencing difficulty in securing a school place for their child or can offer assistance where a child is out of school. The local service is delivered through the national network of Educational Welfare Officers (EWO). Contact details are available at <http://www.tusla.ie/get-in-touch/education-and-welfare/>.

Where there is no placement available for a child with Special Educational Needs, the Department will consider applications under the Home Tuition Grant Scheme, where a student can receive up to 20 hours home tuition per week as an interim measure until a placement becomes available. The availability of a school placement is assessed by the NCSE having regard to, although not limited to, the relevant diagnosis and relevant professional report.

Accordingly, the NCSE advises parents, to seek to enrol their child, by applying in writing, to the school/s of their choice as early as possible. Where parents have been unsuccessful in enrolling their child in a school, they should update their local SENO to inform the planning process.

As the matter raised by the Deputy refers to a particular child, I have arranged for the Deputy's question to be forwarded to the National Council for Special Education for their attention and direct reply.

### **Pupil-Teacher Ratio**

205. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if consideration will be given to the request of an organisation (details supplied) in Budget 2020; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28599/19]

**Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Joe McHugh):** My aim for Budget 2020 is to progressively deliver on the commitments set out in the Programme for Government, the Con-



fidence and Supply Arrangement and my Department's Statement of Strategy and Action Plan, and to meet demographic and demand pressures.

Over the past number of years, the Government has invested significant additional resources in education and training, which has delivered thousands of extra teaching and Special Needs Assistant posts in our schools, increased investment in higher education, expanded apprenticeships and traineeships, increased capitation in schools, enhanced supports for school leadership and improved the staffing schedule in primary schools. The extra teachers in schools and improved staffing schedule measures have resulted in a continued reduction in the pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) in schools with the primary PTR improving from 21.0:1 in 1998 to 15.1:1 in 2018 and post primary PTR improving from 15.0:1 to 12.7:1 over the same period.

In looking at the competing demands for the next Budget, I must have regard to the level of resources which will be available to my Department, in the context of the continuing need for the Government to prudently manage the economy and the public finances and have regard to risks, including those associated with Brexit.

The economic, fiscal and budgetary context for these decisions have been set out in the 2019 Summer Economic Statement, which was published on 25 June by the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform.

It will be in that context that I will formulate specific budgetary priorities, having regard to the views of the education partners and all concerned stakeholders.

### **Garda Operations**

206. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the stage the preparation of a strategic threat risk assessment for An Garda Síochána is at; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28338/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for managing An Garda Síochána, and I, as Minister, have no role in the matter.

I have requested the information asked from the Garda Commissioner and I will write directly to the Deputy on receipt of same.

### **Prison Inspections**

207. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the measures he is taking to address the lack of published inspection reports on closed prisons by the Office of the Inspector of Prisons since 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28406/19]

208. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if there are delays in completion of investigations into deaths in prison custody by the Inspector of Prisons; if there are delays in the publication of reports on such investigations; if so, the number of reports awaiting to be published; and the reason for these delays. [28407/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 207 and 208 together.

The independent Office of the Inspector of Prisons was established in statute under the

Prisons Act 2007. It has a vitally important role in ensuring effective independent oversight of our prison system. It will be appreciated that the office is independent in the performance of its functions and it is always a matter for the Inspector of the day to decide how the functions should be performed within allocated resources.

The current Inspector of Prisons, Ms. Patricia Gilheaney, was appointed in May 2018. Following her appointment, the Inspector contracted consultants to carry out a review of the functions and arrangements of her Office. The report sets out an optimum new enhanced structure for her Office, its legal powers, resources needed and other related issues. The Inspector has recently submitted a request for resources, based on the recommendations in the report, and that request is being analysed and considered in the context of the 2020 estimates process. My Department will continue to work constructively with the Inspector on the enhancement of her Office's resources and capacity.

In terms of additional resources this year, funding has been provided by my Department to contract external expertise to enable the office to review cases of deaths in prisons. A process is also underway to appoint a new office manager. My Department also recently approved the awarding of a contract, following a tender competition, in respect of the development of an Inspection Framework and Strategic Plan for the Office of the Inspector of Prisons.

### **Parental Leave**

209. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the status of legislation to increase the level of paid parental leave; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28415/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton):** The Deputy will be aware that as part of Budget 2019, the Government announced the introduction of a new social insurance-based paid parental benefit scheme. This new scheme will support parents during the first year of the child's life by providing two weeks of paid leave to both parents, and will allow parents more flexibility in achieving and managing a work life balance.

It is envisaged that the scheme will commence in late 2019 and will be available to parents in respect of all children born on or after the date of its implementation.

The conditions of eligibility for the scheme will be provided for in legislation which is currently being developed by my Department, in cooperation with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

I can advise the Deputy that work is well advanced on drafting the legislation, which will be brought to Government for approval shortly.

### **Garda Strength**

210. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí stationed in Portarlinton Garda station; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28418/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for managing An Garda Síochána, including personnel, and I, as Minister, have no role in the matter.

Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

The Garda strength of the Laois/Offaly Division from 2009 to 31 May 2019, as provided by the Commissioner, is available on my Department's website through the following link. [http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/002\\_Garda\\_Numbers\\_by\\_Division\\_District\\_and\\_Station\\_2009\\_to\\_31\\_May\\_2019.xlsx/Files/002\\_Garda\\_Numbers\\_by\\_Division\\_District\\_and\\_Station\\_2009\\_to\\_31\\_May\\_2019.xlsx](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and_Station_2009_to_31_May_2019.xlsx/Files/002_Garda_Numbers_by_Division_District_and_Station_2009_to_31_May_2019.xlsx)

For more general information on Garda Facts and Figures please see the link below

[http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An\\_Garda\\_Siochana\\_facts\\_and\\_figures](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/An_Garda_Siochana_facts_and_figures)

### **Data Protection**

211. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the data protection centre in Portarlinton, County Laois will be moved in the near future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28422/19]

212. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the long-term plans for the data protection centre in Portarlinton, County Laois; when new signage will replace the old signage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28423/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 211 and 212 together.

As I advised the Deputy in February 2019, there are no plans to relocate the Data Protection Commission's office located at Station Road, Portarlinton, Co. Laois. I am advised that there are 29 staff members working at its Portarlinton office across a number of teams (e.g. complaint-handling, investigations, etc.,) and they make a valuable contribution to the statutory functions and role of the Data Protection Commission. As the Deputy will be aware, the Data Protection Commission also has an office in Dublin.

Following the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018, the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner became the Data Protection Commission and I understand, as a result, a process commenced to make the necessary signage and related changes to its corporate identity. In addition to new signage which has recently been added to the entrance of the Portarlinton office, the Office of Public Works has advised that the painting of the surrounding woodwork and walls is due to be carried out during July 2019.

### **Data Protection**

213. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if a person applies for a job at the data protection office in Portarlinton, County Laois will be assigned to just that office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28424/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** Vacancies for the Data Protection Commission office in Portarlinton are filled at the requisite grade from the Laois panel held by the Public Appointments Service (PAS).

From time to time competitions for specific positions within the Data Protection Commis-

sion are run via PAS. In such instances, the competition notifications clearly state whether the position will be in the Dublin office or in the Laois office.

### **Closed-Circuit Television Systems Provision**

214. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason for the delays in granting local communities (details supplied) permission to provide CCTV in circumstances in which the communities have agreement with local councils to act as data controller and the equipment is housed in a local Garda station; if it his Department or the Garda Commissioner that now needs to grant approval; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28448/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** CCTV systems installed for the purposes of crime prevention and as aids to policing in areas to which the general public routinely have access fall into two distinct but complementary categories, namely Garda CCTV systems and community-based CCTV systems. Community CCTV is governed by section 38(3)(c) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 and the Garda Síochána (CCTV) Order 2006 (SI No 289 of 2006). This legal framework requires that any proposed community CCTV scheme must:

- be approved by the local Joint Policing Committee,
- have the prior support of the relevant local authority, which must also act as data controller, and
- have the authorisation of the Garda Commissioner.

This is the legal basis for all community CCTV schemes, regardless of how they are funded.

My Department administers a grant aid scheme which can provide financial assistance to groups intending to establish a community-based CCTV system in their local areas. Eligible groups, including community groups and local authorities, can apply for grant-aid of up to 60% of the total capital cost of a proposed CCTV system, up to a maximum total of €40,000. I would emphasise that grant funding can be considered only for proposed CCTV schemes which have obtained the necessary statutory approvals, as set out above.

I can confirm that my Department has to date not received any application for funding for community CCTV in the area referred to by the Deputy.

I am keen to ensure that all interested groups, in both rural and urban areas, have the opportunity to take advantage of the availability of the grant aid scheme. If the Deputy is aware of groups wishing to avail of the scheme, further details are available to download from my Department's website - [www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie) and support and guidance is available to help interested groups through a dedicated email address [communitycctv@justice.ie](mailto:communitycctv@justice.ie).

### **Garda Data**

215. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the number of gardaí in the Kerry Garda division trained as divisional asset profilers as of 31 December 2017, 31 December 2018 and 7 June 2019, in tabular form. [28494/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for managing An Garda Síochána

including matters relating to personnel.

Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

The Criminal Assets Bureau is a national multi-disciplinary agency specialising in targeting of the proceeds of crime. The Bureau draws together the necessary expertise from a number of Departments and agencies.

The Bureau maintains a presence in each of the Garda Divisions through the operation of the Divisional Assets Profiler Programme. Under this Programme, asset profilers are providing a criminal asset profiling service across the Garda Divisions in relation to persons or suspects operating within the area, with particular reference to those involved in serious and organised crime. The Bureau utilises the local knowledge supplied to it by the asset profilers, which enables it to target the proceeds of crime in local communities. A number of legislative measures have been introduced to tackle gang-related and associated crime, including the Proceeds of Crime (Amendment) Act 2016, which provides additional powers for Gardaí; in particular, powers to allow for the immediate seizure of assets suspected of being the proceeds of crime to prevent them being disposed of.

The following table represents the number of criminal asset profilers within the Kerry Division:

Members of An Garda Síochána Trained as Criminal Asset Profilers – Kerry Division
Total Number Trained up to 31st December 2017 – 8
Total Number Trained up to 31st December 2018 – 9
Total Number Trained up to 2nd July 2019 – 9

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, almost 2,800 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. This and on-going recruitment will clearly provide significant additional policing hours throughout the country, both in terms of the increase in new Gardaí and the redeployment of Gardaí to frontline policing duties due to civilianisation of their current roles. These new resources coming on stream have allowed the Commissioner to allocate additional resources to the specialist bureaus that comprise Garda Special Crime Operations, including the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

### Private Security Industry Regulation

216. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to update the Private Security Services Act 2004. [28495/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** The Private Security Services Act, 2004 (as amended) provides the legal basis for the regulation and licensing of sectors of the private security industry in Ireland. The Private Security Authority (PSA), established under the Private Security Services Act 2004, is the regulatory body with responsibility for regulating and licensing the private security industry. The Authority is a statutorily independent body operating under the aegis of my Department.

The 2004 Act was amended in 2011 by means of amendments to the Civil Law (Miscellaneous) Provisions Act 2011. These amendments strengthened certain financial, licensing and enforcement functions of the Authority and came about following lessons learned by the Au-



thority from its operations since licensing commenced.

In April 2019, I secured Government approval to bring the regulation of private security personnel, employed to assist in enforcing court orders, within the remit of the Private Security Authority. The proposals for this measure and related matters are contained in the report of an Interdepartmental Working Group Report which was published on my Department's website on 9 April, 2019. My Department is working with the Office of the Attorney General to bring forward the necessary legislative provisions as soon as possible.

The 2004 Act is kept under review with a view to bringing forward any further changes where necessary.

### **Prison Staff**

217. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the estimated cost in a full year if 120 additional prison officers were recruited; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28605/19]

**Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Charles Flanagan):** I am advised by the Irish Prison Service that the full year cost of employing 120 new Recruit Prison Officers is €5.6m. However given that recruitment is staggered over the course of the year the actual cost would be somewhat less than this figure, depending on the varying start dates of new recruits.

The recruitment of Recruit Prison Officers by the Irish Prison Service has been ongoing since 2017 and has regard to such factors as service needs and retirement levels. It is anticipated that recruitment will be necessary over the coming years in order for the Irish Prison Service to have sufficient numbers of Prison Officers to provide safe and secure custody for those in our care.

There were 179 new recruits to the Prison Service in 2018. To date this year 68 new recruits have completed their initial training with a further 48 are currently undergoing their initial training. In addition, the Prison Service hope to recruit circa 96 recruits before the end of 2019. This recruitment will assist the Prison Service to keep pace with retirements from the Service.

The known retirements for all prison grades as of 1st July 2019 is 45 which includes 8 compulsory retirements. It should be noted that 389 prison grade staff will be eligible to retire, but are not required to do so, in 2019.

### **Industrial Relations**

218. **Deputy Jan O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation when a hearing will be held in the Labour Court in relation to an unfair dismissals case (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28395/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Pat Breen):** The Labour Court is an independent statutory office under the aegis of my Department. The Court was established under the Industrial Relations Act, 1946. Its functions have been altered and extended by subsequent legislation, including, most recently, the Workplace Relations Act 2015. Under the 2015 Act, the Labour Court assumed the role of sole appellate body in disputes under employment rights legislation.

The Labour Court operates as an independent adjudicative body in carrying out its statu-

tory function and as such it is not appropriate for me to comment on the detail of an individual case which may be before the Labour Court. Any party wishing to enquire about the status of a particular case is asked to contact the Labour Court directly at [info@labourcourt.ie](mailto:info@labourcourt.ie) or telephone +353 1 613 6666.

### **Work Permits Applications**

219. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the reason the review of a critical skills employment permit application by a person (details supplied) has been pending since March 2019 in view of the fact that the website of her Department indicates that it is processing review applications received on 14 June 2019; when a decision can be expected; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28399/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Employment Permits Section of my Department informs me that an application for a Critical Skills Employment Permit in respect of the named individual was received on 14 December 2018. On 8 March 2019, this application was refused because:

- At the time of application the named individual was in the State without current immigration permission as it had been revoked by the Minister for Justice and Equality on 12 December 2018; and

- required documentation had not been submitted.

In addition to being informed of the decision to refuse this application, the applicant was also informed that they could request a review of this decision.

My officials inform me that on 25 March 2019, a request for a review of this decision was received. On 1 July 2019, following due consideration of the information submitted, the Reviewing Officer confirmed the decision to refuse the application as the named individual's immigration permission had been revoked by the Minister for Justice and Equality at the time of application.

### **IDA Ireland Site Visits**

220. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the number of visits the IDA has made to Portarlinton, County Laois over the past five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28421/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The IDA's performance in 2018 reflects the emphasis the Agency and the Government have placed on increasing foreign direct investment (FDI) into regional locations. Last year, for example, 56% of all net new jobs created by IDA client firms were in locations outside Dublin. There are now over 132,000 people employed across 681 firms in IDA client companies outside the capital.

County Laois is marketed as part of the IDA's Midlands Region. There are currently four IDA client companies operating in Co. Laois employing a total of 122 people. Last April the Canadian company Greenfield Global announced plans to establish a new manufacturing facility in Portlaoise which will create 75 new jobs. The Agency is working hard to attract further such investment to the County.

Data on IDA Ireland site visits is collated on a county by county basis. Information on site visits to specific locations - including individual towns - is therefore unavailable. Whilst site visits do remain an important tool in helping showcase regional locations to investors, it is important to remember that the final decision as to where to invest rests solely with the company concerned. It is also the case that site visit activity does not necessarily reflect investment potential, as a significant proportion of all new FDI comes from existing IDA clients already present in the country.

The following table provides details on the number of site visits to Laois from 2015 to Q1 2019:

County	2015	2016	2017	2018	Q1 2019
Laois	4	6	4	10	2

### Trade Agreements

221. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation if she has discussed the potential Mercosur agreement with her other EU counterparts recently. [28209/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** On Friday 28th June last, the EU concluded negotiations for an Association Agreement with Mercosur – after nearly 20 years and 40 rounds of talks. This marks the EU’s largest trade deal to date and is four times the size of the trade agreement with Japan.

Irish exporters have been subject to trade tariffs, barriers and restrictions when exporting to Mercosur. This Agreement will see a significant reduction, or elimination, of tariffs and barriers to trade which will allow a cross flow of trading and investment between Ireland, the EU and the Mercosur region. The EU-Mercosur Agreement should make exports from Ireland more attractive, and potentially increase the demand for Irish products.

As with every Free Trade Agreement, Ireland – like all Member States – has defensive as well as offensive interests. The Agreement with Mercosur presents sectoral opportunities for Ireland in areas such as software and services in telecoms, financial services, digital content and travel, engineering products and services, life sciences, food and beverages, and education services.

On the other hand, I was always keenly aware of the potential impact that this Agreement presents to the EU’s and Ireland’s beef sector. Ireland, along with a number of other Member States, asserted early on in the negotiations that these agricultural sensitivities (and beef in particular) must be fully considered in the negotiations.

In this regard, Ireland has continually highlighted the cumulative impact of agricultural market access in relation to all EU trade agreements. My Department has done this through engagement with the Trade Policy Committee in Brussels, as well as joining with other Member States in formally writing to the Commission outlining our concerns. In addition, our concerns have been raised at political level – including myself and my officials raising the issues with counterparts, both at Trade Council deliberations and bilaterally with the EU Commission.

To that end, I wrote to the EU Trade Commissioner, Cecilia Malmström as recently as 31st May this year to restate my views, which I had previously articulated at European Trade Council meetings, as well as directly with the Trade Commissioner, regarding the current challenges facing the beef sector.

I had sought assurances from the Commission that the final offer on beef – an offensive demand from the Mercosur side – would ensure that:

- the tariff rate quota for beef was low.
- that phasing-in periods were designed to allow sufficient time for Irish and EU industry to adjust,
- the Commission continually monitor quota levels taking into account domestic market conditions,
- the composition of beef imports from the region would be limited in relation to fresh chilled beef, and
- robust checks would be established and monitored at points of import to the EU to ensure animal health and welfare standards have been maintained.

As I am sure you are aware, An Taoiseach also recently wrote to the Commission to highlight our particular sensitivities in these negotiations. An Taoiseach joined the leaders of France, Poland and Belgium on 17th June, in writing to Commission President Juncker expressing our concerns on the inclusion of sensitive agricultural products in the negotiations, and stating that the current quotas for such products must not be increased.

It is disappointing that the agreement reached on beef access is more than we would have wished. Although the quota of 99,000 tonnes is far less than the Mercosur countries were looking for. Also, the Agreement ensures an extended lead-in period before the full “TRQ” takes effect and that five-year period will only commence after the legal text of the Agreement is finalised and “legally scrubbed”, such that the full TRQ for beef will not take effect for some 7/8 years from now. The Government’s active campaign, together with some other Member States, to secure the viability of the Irish and EU beef sector, has been a key component in achieving these ameliorating elements to this particular TRQ for beef.

Despite our strenuous efforts, we obviously are disappointed in relation to beef. However, it’s important also to recognise the positive aspects to the deal as I’ve outlined earlier. In terms of Agriculture, it is important to note that the dairy sector will benefit from the removal of tariffs on cheese, milk powder and infant formula. There are also benefits for the drinks industry.

We now intend to carry out a comprehensive economic assessment of the deal to see what impact it’ll have on the Irish economy and on jobs and that will inform future actions.

### **Departmental Funding**

222. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation the budget allocation for the Labour Court and Workplace Relations Commission in 2018 and 2019, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28604/19]

**Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Heather Humphreys):** The Deputy should note that the Labour Court and Workplace Relations Commission form part of the overall Workplace Relations Programme area of my Department. The overall funding allocation for this area increased by €1,106m in 2019.

The distribution of Exchequer funding allocations for the Labour Court and the Workplace Relations Commission as per the 2018 and 2019 Revised Estimates Volumes provided through my Department’s Vote is set out in the following table.

	2018 REV Allocation Current(€,000)	2019 REV Allocation Current(€,000)
Labour Court	3,800	3,876
Workplace Relations Commission	14,014	15,014
Workplace Relations Programme	18,104	19,120

It will be seen that the allocation to the Workplace Relations Programme, including the specific allocations to the Labour Court and the Workplace Relations Commission, increased in 2019.

This increase demonstrates the Government's commitment to ensuring that the Department's Offices in the Workplace Relations Programme area are sufficiently funded and resourced to enable them to carry out their regulatory functions.

### Cancer Screening Programmes

223. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health his plans to apologise to the women and their families who have been affected by the cervical cancer scandal; the way in which he will do same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28426/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Consideration is being given to an appropriate form of apology, and this will be discussed with the 221+ before any final decision is made. I have met and spoken with many of the women involved, including at a meeting in January 2019, at which I apologised for how women and families were treated, as well as thanking them for sharing their views and experiences. The National Cancer Screening Service wrote last year to each woman affected, or their next of kin, apologising for the failures in relation to disclosure and setting out the actions being taken by the HSE to address the issues identified. The former Director General of the HSE, and the former head of Cervical Check have also apologised personally to individual women when the opportunity has arisen. Last year, Cervical Check placed advertisements with national media outlets apologising for how standards fell short in relation to this issue. It is also very important to note the actions taken by the State to address the issues identified in the Scoping Inquiry led by Dr Scally. Government has accepted in full the recommendations of the Scoping Inquiry and work is ongoing to implement these in full. In relation to the women concerned I am pleased that the Ex-Gratia Scheme has made its first payments in relation to the non-disclosure of audit results, and I understand that the panel will meet again shortly to consider further payments

### General Practitioner Services

224. **Deputy Seán Haughey** asked the Minister for Health if non-EU general practitioners will be encouraged to live and work here in view of the shortage of general practitioners including locum doctors; the measures he is taking to deal with the situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28314/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Government is committed to increasing GP capacity to ensure that patients across the country continue to have access to GP services and that general practice is sustainable in all areas into the future.

General Practitioners are self-employed private practitioners, most of whom have contracts



with the HSE to provide services under various public health schemes.

A range of measures have been introduced in recent years that will benefit patients and help make general practice more sustainable and a more attractive career option for all GPs, including non-EU general practitioners eligible to practise in Ireland.

These include changes to the entry provisions to the GMS scheme to accommodate more flexible/shared GMS GP contracts, and to the retirement provisions for GPs under the GMS scheme, allowing GPs to hold GMS contracts until their 72nd birthday. Enhanced supports for rural GP practices have also been introduced. There has also been a significant expansion in the number of places on GP training programmes in recent years; up from 120 places in 2009 to 183 filled in 2019.

An agreement with the Irish Medical Organisation on contractual reform has been recently concluded. In return for cooperation with a wide range of service developments and reforms, the Government will increase investment in general practice by approximately 40% (or €210 million) over the 2019-2023 period.

This will see significant increases in capitation fees for GPs who participate in the reform programme and the introduction of new fees and subsidies for additional services such as the chronic disease management programme. There will also be increased support for GPs working in rural practices and for those in disadvantaged urban areas. Improvements in the maternity and paternity leave arrangements have also been agreed, in recognition of the need to ensure that general practice is compatible with doctors' family commitments.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

225. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect an appointment for cataract treatment. [28322/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Care of the Elderly Provision**

226. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 458 of 11 June 2019, when a reply will issue from the HSE. [28326/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** I understand that the

Health Services Executive responded to the Deputy on the 28/06/2019.

### **Medicinal Products Reimbursement**

227. **Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe** asked the Minister for Health if the reimbursement of the cost of Respreeza to patients will be reconsidered. [28329/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE has statutory responsibility for decisions on the pricing and reimbursement of medicines under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The HSE carefully considered the pricing and reimbursement of human alpha1-proteinase inhibitor (Respreeza). The applicant was notified in August 2017 that the HSE was unable to recommend reimbursement. The HSE concluded that there was not enough evidence to suggest that patients would derive a clinically meaningful benefit from this treatment and that the current price was not a cost effective use of resources. I understand that the HSE and the applicant have since signed a ring-fenced agreement for the continued supply of this medicine to the patients involved in the original patient access programme, which starts from the commencement of the next clinical trial. This is expected to commence this year.

### **Cross-Border Health Services Provision**

228. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the length of time it is taking for patients to receive back payment after using the cross-border directive scheme for surgery; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28337/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE is responsible for the operation of the Cross Border Directive and the management of the HSE Cross Border Directive (CBD) office is an operational matter for the HSE. I have, therefore, asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

It should be noted that the numbers of persons availing of the Directive has been increasing steadily for a number of years with a corresponding increase in the workload for the CBD office. I am aware that the HSE is currently considering a business case, and other interim steps, to address issues which have arisen with regard to the processing of reimbursements.

### **Cross-Border Health Services Provision**

229. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) is waiting since April 2019 for arrears from the cross-border directive payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28346/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Departmental Communications**

230. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health the details of all travel, meetings and attendance of all meetings a person (details supplied) and their team or their associates and his Department or related parties had as part of the review by them of the cervical cancer scandal by date, in tabular form. [28348/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As outlined in my response to the Deputy's previous questions on 21 and 28 May, I and/or officials from my Department have met with the Scoping Inquiry on a number of occasions since the Scoping Inquiry was established. These meetings were led by Dr Scally and in some instances he was accompanied by other members of his team. In keeping with the independence of the Scoping Inquiry in conducting this work my Department does not hold records of the travel arrangements of Dr Scally or other members of the Scoping Inquiry team.

The dates of all meetings involving the Department, insofar as they have been ascertained following a comprehensive search of records, are outlined in the following table:

Date	Details
7 May	Preliminary meeting with Department officials on work of the Inquiry
24 May	Dr Scally met with Department officials to facilitate the work of the Inquiry
11 June	Dr Scally met with Minister and Department officials to submit his First and Progress Reports
12 July	Dr Scally participated in a teleconference with Department officials and RCOG representatives
8 August	Dr Scally met with Department official to facilitate the work of the inquiry
28 August	Dr Scally met with Department official to facilitate the work of the inquiry
28 August	Dr Scally met with Department official to facilitate the work of the inquiry
10 September	Dr Scally met with Minister and Department officials to discuss his Final Report
10 October	Dr Scally met with Minister and Department officials to discuss the implementation of his recommendations and the progress of his supplementary report
20 November	Dr Scally met with Department officials to discuss implementation of his recommendations
17 December	Dr Scally met with Department officials to discuss implementation of his recommendations
31 January	Dr Scally attended Minister's meeting with 221+ Patient Support Group, following which he met with Minister and Department officials to discuss progress of supplementary report
14 February	Dr Scally met with Department officials to discuss progress of Supplementary Report
7 June	Dr Scally met with Minister and Department officials to discuss his Supplementary Report following submission

### **Medicinal Products Availability**

231. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health when in 2019 he expects to bring forward a policy statement in order to increase the use of biosimilar drugs in order that better value for money is achieved in the purchase of medicines; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28360/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** My Department and the HSE are engaging in a number of initiatives which will lead to better access to medicines for patients, value for the taxpayer and the cost- effective provision of medicines in Ireland.

A public consultation on a National Biosimilar Medicines Policy was undertaken by my Department in 2017. The responses to that consultation and other possible policy levers are being considered by my Department, with a view to developing a National Biosimilar Medicines Policy statement.. At an operational level, the HSE's Acute Hospitals Drugs Management Programme has a biosimilar strategy in place since 2017, which is making considerable progress using a collaborative approach with hospital pharmacists and clinical teams to bring about changes in prescribing practice. In that respect, hospitals are working towards a targeted minimum prescribing rate for biosimilars of 50%.

The HSE is also working on identifying barriers to the prescribing of biosimilars, with a specific focus on education and support. It is seeking to increase understanding of biosimilars through targeted presentations to clinicians and hospitals.

The objective of these initiatives is a greater uptake in the use of biosimilars and this is evident by hospital dispensing data. For example, the prescribing rate for the biosimilar drug Infliximab has increased from 5% in 2017 to 40% in 2018. I am informed that, since the introduction of the Medicines Management Programme's biosimilar guidelines on 1 June 2019, more than 100 patients have already moved to biosimilar medicines.

My Department proposes to build on these positive developments and to bring forward a policy statement that would support and complement the many initiatives which are already underway.

### **Primary Care Centres Data**

232. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Health the number of primary healthcare centres delivered and that are fully operational to date in 2019, in each CHO area; the number of primary healthcare centres under construction and due to open in 2019 in each CHO area; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28361/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the HSE has responsibility for the provision, along with the maintenance and operation of Primary Care Centres and other Primary Care facilities, the Executive has been asked to reply directly to the Deputy.

### **Cancer Services Provision**

233. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health when two new treatments for colon cancer (details supplied) will be made available in hospitals here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28364/19]

234. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the reason new treatments for colon cancer have not been made available to patients in view of the fact that some oncologists working in hospitals here have been trained to deliver the new treatments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28367/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 233 and 234 together.

Hepatic Arterial Infusion (HAI) is a medical procedure that delivers chemotherapy directly to the liver. A number of innovative liver-directed treatments are utilised in Irish hospitals including Radio-Frequency Ablation which uses heat to kill cancer cells and Hyperthermic Intraperitoneal Chemotherapy (HIPEC) which delivers chemotherapy directly to the peritoneal (abdominal) cavity.

The HSE's National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) provides some funding for a variety of chemotherapy programmes including HIPEC, as agreed during the HSE service planning process. The funding of any new services requiring additional resources takes place via the HSE service planning process.

### **Home Help Service Data**

235. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Health the number of persons in counties Laois and Offaly on waiting lists for home help hours, homecare packages and respite care by category; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28366/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Medicinal Products Availability**

236. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to ensure fast, efficient and equal access to new medicines for persons with MS here is in line with other countries in Europe; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28371/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The HSE has statutory responsibility for medicine pricing and reimbursement decisions, under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013. The Act specifies criteria for decisions on the reimbursement of medicines. As Minister, I have no role in this statutory process.

HSE decisions on which medicines are reimbursed by the taxpayer are made on objective, scientific and economic grounds, including on the advice of the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE). The NCPE conducts health technology assessments (HTAs) for the HSE and makes recommendations on reimbursement to assist HSE decisions. The NCPE uses a decision framework to systematically assess whether a drug's clinical and cost effectiveness as a health intervention.

The HSE strives to reach a decision in as timely a manner as possible. However, because of the significant monies involved, it must ensure that the best price is achieved, as these commitments are often multi-million euro, ongoing investments. This can lead to a protracted deliberation process.



In regard to new treatments for multiple sclerosis, I wish to advise you that the NCPE completed a health technology assessment in August 2018 on ocrelizumab for adult patients with relapsing forms of multiple sclerosis. The NCPE recommended that ocrelizumab not be considered for reimbursement unless cost-effectiveness can be improved relative to existing treatments.

In addition, in October 2018 the NCPE completed its assessment of ocrelizumab for adult patients with early primary progressive multiple sclerosis and did not recommend that it be reimbursed for this indication.

The HSE has advised that there has been considerable engagement with the applicant and commercial discussions are ongoing. The HSE's final decision on reimbursement will take into consideration the statutory criteria contained in the 2013 Health Act.

The HSE has also commissioned an HTA for Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol/cannabidiol (THC/CBD). This is indicated for symptom improvement in adult patients with moderate to severe spasticity due to multiple sclerosis, who have not responded adequately to other anti-spasticity medication and who demonstrate clinically significant improvement in spasticity-related symptoms during an initial trial. The NCPE is currently awaiting information from the applicant for the HTA.

### **Hospital Appointments Status**

237. **Deputy Barry Cowen** asked the Minister for Health when a person (details supplied) can expect an appointment. [28381/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Healthcare Infrastructure Provision**

238. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health when funding will be provided for the design of the new maternity hospital in Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28382/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of public healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you in relation to this matter.

## **Mental Health Services Provision**

239. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the concerns raised that persons are being admitted through the emergency department of Letterkenny University Hospital for psychiatric care; if consideration will be given to change the practice; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28397/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

## **HSE Planning**

240. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Health when the HSE capital plan for 2019 and 2020 will be published. [28400/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** My Department has been working with the Health Service Executive and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to develop a multi annual capital plan for the health services.

The Summer Economic Statement, published recently by the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, provides an expenditure reserve of up to €200m in 2020 to accommodate funding requirements for the new children's hospital and the National Broadband Plan.

This will allow my Department and the HSE to finalise a multi-annual Capital Plan.

The Health capital allocation in 2019 is now €642m for the construction and equipping of health facilities. This represents an increase of €224m on last year's capital provision.

The HSE Capital Plan will determine the projects that can progress in 2019 and beyond having regard to the available capital funding, the number of large national capital projects currently underway, the cashflow requirements attaching to each project and the relevant priority.

## **Hospital Services**

241. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Health if assistance for travel to hospitals can be given to a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28416/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service issue, I have asked the HSE to reply to you directly.

## **Hospital Staff**

242. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Minister for Health the steps he will take to address the shortage of doctors in St. Finbarr's Hospital, Cork to clear the backlog of patients awaiting procedures such as colonoscopy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28430/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond to you directly as soon as possible

## **Assisted Human Reproduction Services Provision**

243. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to enable persons seeking to undertake IVF treatment to defray some of the costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28434/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** In October 2017, the Government approved the drafting of a Bill on assisted human reproduction (AHR) and associated areas of research, based on the published General Scheme of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill. The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health is currently conducting a review of the General Scheme as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny process, which began in January of last year. The Joint Committee intends to report thereon before the summer recess and the recommendations in its report will be considered during the ongoing process of drafting this Bill in conjunction with the Office of the Attorney General.

Interlinked with the legislation, officials in my Department, in conjunction with the HSE, are developing a model of care for infertility and an associated public fund for AHR. This work includes developing proposals on the allocation of the €1 million fund for use in relation to providing public AHR treatment which was announced in December 2018.

Accordingly, options in relation to the parameters of any potential public funding model, including what eligibility criteria may be included, are still under consideration, and an announcement will be forthcoming once the relevant decisions have been finalised.

It should be noted that while AHR treatment is not currently funded by the Irish Public Health Service there is some support available in that patients who access IVF treatment privately may claim tax relief on the costs involved under the tax relief for medical expenses scheme. In addition, a defined list of fertility medicines needed for fertility treatment is covered under the High Tech Arrangements administered by the HSE. Medicines covered by the High Tech Arrangements must be prescribed by a consultant/specialist and authorised for supply to the client's nominated community pharmacy by the High Tech Hub managed by the Primary Care Reimbursement Service. The cost of the medicines is then covered, as appropriate, under the client's eligibility, i.e., Medical Card or Drugs Payment Scheme.

Overall, the development of a model of care for infertility will help to ensure the provision of safe, effective and accessible services through the public health system as part of the full range of services available in obstetrics and gynaecology.

## **Healthcare Infrastructure Provision**

244. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Health if the main contractor (details supplied) fully complied with the community nursing unit contract in relation to the €18 million community nursing unit on Tymon North Road, Tallaght, Dublin 24; and if he will provide the supporting evidence to ensure that the main contractor and its sub-contractors are fully compliant with all employment law as required by the contract at each interim payment made during the contract [28451/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As the Health Service Executive is responsible for the delivery of public healthcare infrastructure projects, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to you in relation to this matter.

## Medicinal Products Availability

245. **Deputy Bobby Aylward** asked the Minister for Health if he will consider the possibility of extending the availability of the flash glucose monitoring technology, FreeStyle Libre, to all persons with type 1 diabetes; if the possibility of requesting the HSE to undertake a review of the cost effectiveness of this technology and survey current users on the impact it has had on their daily life experience and social interactions will be investigated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28455/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health (Pricing and Supply of Medical Goods) Act 2013, the HSE has statutory responsibility for the administration of the community drug schemes; therefore, the matter has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

## Health Services Provision

246. **Deputy Stephen Donnelly** asked the Minister for Health the status of the work of the contraception working group in his Department; the finalised terms of reference; the timeline for completion of the work of the group; the consultation process; the stakeholders the group has engaged with to date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28459/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Department's Working Group commenced its work on 30 April and has since been engaged in consideration of the range of policy, regulatory and legislative issues arising in relation to improving access to contraception.

The following Terms of Reference have been adopted:

- To conduct a rapid review of national and international literature on contraception and associated issues;

- To specifically examine the extent to which cost is a barrier to accessing reliable methods of contraception in Ireland and to consider whether there are other factors influencing access to contraception that could be addressed;

- To examine mechanisms to address any access issues identified, including financial, legislative, regulatory and contractual issues, as well as any other relevant matters;

- To consult with relevant stakeholders; and

- To make recommendations to the Minister on the optimal policy options and next steps.

The Working Group will seek written submissions from stakeholders and other interested parties and is currently developing a consultation questionnaire which, pending final testing, should commence shortly. Details of stakeholder engagement will be available once the Group has completed its work.

It is intended that the group will report to the Minister at the end of September 2019.

## Clinical Indemnity Scheme

247. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Health if the case of a person (details supplied) will be reviewed. [28461/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The State Claims Agency has a statutory remit to manage personal injury claims, including claims in respect of clinical negligence, on behalf of Delegated State Authorities (DSA's) including the Health Service Executive.

The Clinical Indemnity Scheme (CIS) is the main scheme under which the State Claims Agency (SCA) manages all clinical negligence claims taken against healthcare enterprises, hospitals and clinical, nursing and allied healthcare practitioners covered by the scheme.

I have been informed by the SCA, that it is not managing this case. Where an individual wishes to make a claim for clinical malpractice or negligence, however, they or their solicitor should, in the first instance, submit a letter of claim to the State Claims Agency setting out the particulars of the case.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

248. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Health if posts (details supplied) are open for applications; when the recruitment window will close; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28462/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Orthodontic Services Provision**

249. **Deputy Peter Burke** asked the Minister for Health the status of orthodontic treatment for a person (details supplied). [28464/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Services for People with Disabilities**

250. **Deputy Frank O'Rourke** asked the Minister for Health when the HSE disability services in north County Kildare will follow-up in respect of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28478/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The Government is committed to providing services and supports for people with disabilities which will empower them to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and enhance their ability to tailor the supports required to meet their needs and plan their lives. This commitment is outlined in the Programme for Partnership Government, which is guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for



people with disabilities.

As the Deputy's question relates to service matters, I have arranged for the question to be referred to the Health Service Executive (HSE) for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Data Protection**

251. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to difficulties posed to bereavement counsellors by GDPR in respect of precluding them from contacting family members of persons that have died in hospices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28488/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** The Health Service Executive (HSE) and other health service providers must ensure that all data is processed and controlled in line with the principles of the GDPR and relevant Irish legislation.

However, as the Data Protection Commission has highlighted, GDPR is not intended to stop or hamper the legitimate, lawful use and sharing of personal data. The GDPR is a 'principles-based' piece of legislation that sets out certain high-level rules, consisting of limitations and obligations, addressed to those who process personal data (data controllers). At the same time, it also gives individuals whose personal data are processed (data subjects) a range of rights to help them control how their personal data is used and ensure that these uses are both lawful and transparent.

Confusion can arise in some instances, primarily where data controllers do not fully understand the GDPR or have been given incorrect advice. In the circumstances identified by the Deputy, there is clearly a need to first analyse whether, in fact, there is a legal impediment under the GDPR to the activities in question. As this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond directly to the Deputy.

### **Hospital Waiting Lists**

252. **Deputy Niamh Smyth** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) is waiting for a hernia operation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28507/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** Under the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is required to manage and deliver, or arrange to be delivered on its behalf, health and personal social services. Section 6 of the HSE Governance Act 2013 bars the Minister for Health from directing the HSE to provide a treatment or a personal service to any individual or to confer eligibility on any individual.

The National Waiting List Management Policy, a standardised approach to managing scheduled care treatment for in-patient, day case and planned procedures, since January 2014, has been developed to ensure that all administrative, managerial and clinical staff follow an agreed national minimum standard for the management and administration of waiting lists for scheduled care. This policy, which has been adopted by the HSE, sets out the processes that hospitals are to implement to manage waiting lists.

In relation to the particular query raised, as this is a service matter, I have asked the HSE to respond to the Deputy directly.

### **Care of the Elderly Provision**

253. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health the number of home support package hours which had originally been budgeted for in 2018 and 2019 in County Donegal; the number of home support package hours which were provided, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28540/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **Home Help Service Provision**

254. **Deputy Maurice Quinlivan** asked the Minister for Health the reason a person (details supplied) cannot obtain more than five home help hours allocated; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28600/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jim Daly):** As this is a service matter I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy as soon as possible.

### **General Practitioner Data**

255. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Health the level of cover available to general practitioners in County Cork who may wish to take leave; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28609/19]

**Minister for Health (Deputy Simon Harris):** As this question relates to a service matter, I have arranged for it to be referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply to the Deputy.

### **Hare Coursing Regulation**

256. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will consider replacing the use of live hares with drag hares at coursing events as a matter of urgency in view of the cruelty involved and the fact that mechanical drag hares are already used in greyhound racing events; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [24076/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Coursing is regulated under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly by the Irish Coursing Club (ICC), subject to the general control of Bord na gCon.

The ICC is committed to maintaining high standards in the sport of coursing, and it actively promotes the protection and conservation of the Irish hare. The ICC has assured my Department that it has extensive systems and practices in place to underpin the welfare of hares and greyhounds involved in coursing and also that it goes to great lengths to ensure the highest standards of welfare are adhered to.

Coursing operates in a highly regulated environment coupled with a comprehensive set of rules directly applied by the ICC. It operates under a licence from the Minister of Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht, issued annually with a total of 26 conditions. These include a variety of

measures, including a requirement that a qualified veterinarian attends at all coursing meetings to report on the health of the hares, a prohibition on the coursing of hares more than once in the same day, a prohibition on the coursing of sick or pregnant hares and a requirement that hares be released back into the wild during daylight hours.

The ICC undertakes a range of actions to address issues related to health and welfare. Coursing clubs are required to comply fully with directives, instructions and guidance notes issued by the ICC in all matters relating to the capture, keeping in captivity, tagging, marking, coursing and release of hares, and the muzzling of greyhounds.

A monitoring committee on coursing is in place, comprising officials from my Department, the ICC and the National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS), to monitor developments in coursing and in that regard the situation is kept under constant review to ensure that coursing is run in a well controlled and responsible manner in the interests of both hares and greyhounds.

The committee meets after each coursing season to review the outcome of all coursing meetings, having particular regard to hare and greyhound welfare.

I believe that it is critically important that those involved in coursing operate in accordance with the regulatory framework and that the welfare of both hares and greyhounds is at the forefront at all times. I have no plans at present to alter this arrangement.

### **Greyhound Industry**

257. **Deputy Alan Kelly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the date on which his officials or persons in his Department became aware of the report prepared by a company (details supplied) for the Irish Greyhound Board. [28327/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Bord na gCon is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

My Department was aware in 2017 that the interim CEO of Bord na gCon, who was in place at that time, had commissioned an in-depth business model analysis of the organisation. However, I understand that the Board had concerns regarding the reliability of the data that the report's recommendations were based on, and as such, chose not to adopt it as policy and did not refer it to the Department for consideration.

The report was received by my Department on 24th May 2019.

### **Beef Industry**

258. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the conditions attached to the receipt of funding under the Brexit beef plan of the European Commission will be removed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28369/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I am keenly aware that the past few months have been very challenging for beef farmers in particular, following a difficult year for farm incomes in 2018 due to weather conditions. There was a prolonged and exceptional period of depressed prices lasting from autumn 2018 to spring 2019,

with the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the outcome of Brexit, among other factors, contributing to this market disturbance.

The recent announcement by Commissioner Hogan of EU exceptional aid for the Irish beef sector is very welcome in this context. I have been making the case for some time for an exceptional aid package from the EU Commission for Irish beef farmers, at EU Council of Agriculture Minister meetings, and in direct consultation with the Commission.

The submission made by my Department to the EU Commission in request of the aid package is available on my Department's website: <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmingsectors/beef/>

This exceptional aid has been granted by the European Commission on the basis that the Irish beef sector is heavily reliant on export markets, and is uniquely exposed to shifts in the UK market in particular. Additionally, Ireland's extensive beef system with its comparatively long production cycle presents challenges in responding to market shifts. The Commission has also recognised that it is in the interests of the market stability of EU beef sector to avoid a situation where downward price pressure on Irish beef spills over to other Member States.

This temporary exceptional aid provision is given effect through a Commission Implementing Regulation. This regulation, the draft of which is available on the Commission's website, will be published soon.

Article 1.3 of the implementing regulation provides as follows:

The measures taken by Ireland shall be aimed at reducing production or restructuring the beef and veal sector and one or more of the following objectives:

- (a) implementation of quality schemes in the beef and veal sector or projects aiming at promoting quality and value added;
- (b) boosting market diversification;
- (c) protecting and improving the farmers' environmental, climate and economic sustainability.

Ireland must now notify the Commission, no later than 31 July 2019, of the measures to be taken in accordance with the Regulation. My Department is currently working on the detailed parameters of an exceptional aid scheme, in cooperation with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the European Commission.

Further details on the aid scheme will be announced in due course following the appropriate stakeholder consultation.

### **TAMS Administration**

259. **Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the new paperwork is in place to export surplus power to the national grid in relation to TAMS 3 solar applications. [28379/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The suite of investments eligible for grant aid under TAMS II has recently been extended to include on-farm solar PV and battery storage facilities. The focus of TAMS II is on the provision of grant aid for on-farm investments and the electricity generated is intended for consumption on the farm

enterprise.

Wider energy policy including issues regarding the export of power to the national grid are a matter for my colleague the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

### **Animal Identification Schemes**

260. **Deputy Michael Collins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason the NBAS31B form has been removed from use by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28401/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The facility to record ‘feedlot movements’ on the AIM system, utilising a NBAS 31 B form, was introduced originally to assist in the establishment of stocking density for premia payments. The option to record this movement type is no longer required.

My Department therefore removed the ‘feedlot option’ for herds operating as ‘bed and breakfast’ or contract rearing operations on 1 June 2018 and now categorises such movements as “farm-to-farm” which reflects the actual event that takes place. With effect from that date, the option to apply for a Certificate of Compliance for ‘movement of animals to another holding for feeding purposes’ using a NBAS 31 B application form is no longer applicable. All applications received on or after 1 June 2018 for movement to a ‘feedlot’ are treated as an application for the movement of an animal(s) to another holding.

Keepers can apply online for a Certificate of Compliance to move an animal to another holding using agfood.ie online services or an approved farm software package. Alternatively, keepers can complete a form NBAS 31A (which is available on the Department’s website or from a Regional Veterinary Office) and submit it to the Cattle Movement Notification Agency in Clonakilty.

### **Common Fisheries Policy**

261. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason civil society groups have been excluded from the annual fisheries negotiations between Norway and the EU, including Ireland; if he will make representations to ensure that civil society is included in the negotiations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28408/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Ireland has a limited interest in the annual EU/Norway consultations. Our primary concern is with regard to the use of Blue whiting, an important pelagic stock, in exchanges from which we receive little benefit. We do not get involved in TAC setting discussions given that we do not have any quota for the relevant stocks.

Officials from my Department form part of the overall EU delegation which includes representatives from other Member States and is headed by an official from the European Commission who have exclusive competence with regard to such consultations. Representatives from the fishing industry are also often present in the building as observers but do not attend either the EU coordination meetings or the consultations themselves.

In these circumstances, the inclusion of representatives from civil society groups in the same manner as those from the fishing industry would need to be agreed with the Commission and those Member States in particular who, unlike Ireland, do have a direct management inter-



est in the stocks under discussion in the EU/Norway consultations.

### Common Fisheries Policy

262. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if his attention has been drawn to the fact that nine out of 16 TACs for shared stocks in 2019 decided during the Norway-EU fisheries consultations exceed ICES scientific advice; and if he will request the EU Commission to consult with Norway with the ICES TAC advice serving as an upper limit in line with the principles of good governance of the CFP Article 3 and the CFP target of sustainable rates of fishing by 2020 in view of the evidence. [28409/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Ireland has a limited interest in the annual EU/Norway consultations. Our primary concern is with regard to the use of Blue whiting, an important pelagic stock, in exchanges from which we receive little benefit. We do not get involved in TAC setting discussions given that we do not have any quota for the relevant stocks.

The European Commission has exclusive competence with regard to these consultations and its actions are governed by the Common Fisheries Policy (Regulation (EU) 1380/2013). As the Deputy states, that includes principles of good governance as set down in Article 3 of that Regulation. The Commission are also bound by Article 33 of the same regulation regarding the management of stocks of common interest with third countries such as Norway. This article states that the *'Union shall engage with those third countries with a view to ensuring that those stocks are managed in sustainable manner that is consistent with ...the objective laid down in Article 2(2)*. It is that article which contains the objective of reaching the maximum sustainable yield exploitation rate by 2020.

### TAMS Eligibility

263. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the ceiling of €80,000 on the TAMS scheme for pig producers will be reviewed and extended to €500,000 due to the intensive nature of the business and the large investments required to fulfil animal welfare responsibilities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28513/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The TAMS II budget is being monitored on a continual basis in view of the 26,000 applications received and the 20,000 approvals issued to date. Over 10,000 of these approvals have yet to be claimed as payments. It is expected that the TAMS II budget will be fully spent based on the number of applications received and factoring in the number of future tranches. The most recent tranche of the scheme had a record number of 3,200 applicants which is the highest level of applications under any tranche to date.

Any increase in the ceiling for the Pigs and Poultry Investment Scheme of TAMS II from the existing ceiling would also require EU Commission approval to a formal amendment to Ireland's Rural Development Plan.

### Beef Industry

264. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if the matter of cattle prices here will be addressed (details supplied); and if he will make a

statement on the matter. [28538/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** As the Deputy will be aware, as Minister for Agriculture, I have no role in determining prices for any commodity nor can I intervene in the same.

The Beef Sector is an important element of the Irish economy and I am conscious of the importance that this key sector plays in rural Ireland.

I am keenly aware that the past few months have been very challenging for beef farmers in particular, following a difficult year for farm incomes in 2018 due to weather conditions. There was a prolonged and exceptional period of depressed prices lasting from autumn 2018 to spring 2019, with the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the outcome of Brexit, among other factors, contributing to this market disturbance.

The recent announcement by Commissioner Hogan of EU exceptional aid for the Irish beef sector is very welcome in this context. I have been making the case for some time for an exceptional aid package from the EU Commission for Irish beef farmers, at EU Council of Agriculture Minister meetings, and in direct consultation with the Commission.

Further details on the aid package will be announced in due course following the appropriate stakeholder consultation.

The Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP) is currently the main support specifically targeted for the suckler sector, which provides Irish beef farmers with some €300 million in funding over the current RDP period. Building on this is the exchequer funded Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot (BEEP), a €20 million pilot project for 2019.

My Department has rolled out a range of schemes as part of the €4 billion Rural Development Programme (RDP), 2014 - 2020. In addition to the BDGP, other supports which are available for suckler farmers under Pillar II of the CAP include GLAS, ANCs and Knowledge Transfer Groups. Suckler farmers also benefit from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Greening payments under CAP Pillar I.

My Department is examining all appropriate measures to support the different agrifood sectors, including the suckler sector in preparation for the next iteration of the CAP, and through the next Agri Food strategy to 2030. My view is that such measures should support and encourage suckler farmers to make the best decisions possible to improve the profitability and the economic and environmental efficiency of their farming system.

### **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

265. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the degree to which the relatively low levels of carbon emissions of Ireland have been compared with the higher level in other jurisdictions when calculating reduction targets; the extent to which such comparisons have resulted in lower targets for the agri-food industry here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28585/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department recognises that current and future EU climate targets pose considerable challenges for Irish agriculture due to the fact that agriculture accounts for 33% of national emissions.

The EU targets to 2030, negotiated by my colleague, Minister Bruton, are guided by the

EU's commitments under the Paris Agreement agreed in 2015. The Paris agreement aims to tackle 95% of global emissions through 188 Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) which will increase in ambition over time. The agreement means that the EU has a target of a 40% in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. Ireland's contribution to the Paris Agreement will be via the NDC proposed by the EU on behalf of its Member States.

The Effort Sharing Regulation proposal suggested a 39% GHG reduction target for Ireland for the period 2021 to 2030 relative to 2005, again based on GDP per capita. However, this emissions target was adjusted downward for cost-effectiveness, by 9%, so the national target is 30% by 2030.

Ireland has also been offered flexible mechanisms including 5.6% to be achieved via offsetting emissions by sequestering carbon dioxide through Land Use, Land use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) This constitutes the highest level of flexibility available to any member state. It was recognised that Ireland had two specific difficulties in reaching targets by emissions reduction alone and therefore has a higher level of flexibilities than those for other EU member states;

1. The ratio of Ireland's non-Emission trading sector (including agriculture); Emission Trading Sector (principally heavy industry) emissions is higher than in most member states;

2. The high proportion of agricultural emissions with low mitigation potential in total Irish GHG emissions.

While Ireland is internationally recognised as having one of the most carbon efficient systems of food production in the EU, and when compared to other EU countries, there is huge variability in carbon efficiency that exists within the country. The Teagasc Sustainability Survey shows that the top performing third of farms emitted, on average, 9.6 kg CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent per kg beef, compared with 14.9 kg for the bottom performing third of cattle farms. Reducing this variability is a real opportunity to make progress in reducing emissions from cattle production in Ireland with positive economic dividend on the farms concerned.

I am confident that the agriculture sector as a whole will contribute significantly to achieving Ireland's targets and its transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy and society with collaboration, co-operation and collective responsibility being key in achieving this ambition.

## **Forestry Sector**

266. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which increased forestry is likely to play a role in meeting the carbon reduction targets of Ireland. [28586/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Forests can make an important contribution to climate action through the sequestration and storage of carbon dioxide and by supplying sustainable and renewable materials that support the decarbonisation of our economy.

The Government's Climate Action Plan 2019 recognises this key role which afforestation has to play in climate change mitigation particularly through carbon sequestration. Under current rules agreed as part of the EU Effort Sharing Regulation, forestry can contribute some 2.1 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per annum of carbon towards Ireland's emissions targets under the next climate mitigation period 2021-2030.

Planting achieved under successive afforestation programmes will be the basis for this emis-

sions reductions figure. The Climate Action Plan now sets a target of an average of 8,000 hectares of new planting per year. While this will mostly yield benefits in the longer term post-2030, it will also contribute to our 2030 target through carbon sequestration.

My Department has approved an average of 9,000 hectares for new planting each year for the last three years. This means that there are almost 10,000 approved and shovel-ready hectares available to the forestry sector which could be planted today. The challenge is to ensure that all of the effort that goes into securing and approving new sites results in those sites being planted, if planting levels are to increase and the target of 18% land cover is to be achieved. I am committed to working towards this target through the continued provision of generous grants and premiums, engagement with a range of stakeholders from farmers to public bodies, a dedicated promotion and communication campaign, and by examining ways in which farm forestry can be better integrated into the new CAP. Knowledge transfer programmes and other initiatives which raise awareness of the economic and ecosystem benefits of forestry will continue to play an important role in tackling some of the barriers to planting.

### **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

267. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the proportion of non-arable wetlands and the extent to which such lands are reckonable in terms of carbon reduction; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28587/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department recognises wetlands as an important carbon pool. Reducing emissions from these areas is a means to contribute to our climate ambitions through mobilising Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) credits over the period 2021 to 2030. This is an important part of Agriculture's contribution to the emission reductions and is set out in the all of Government Climate Action Plan released on June 17th 2019.

The Climate Action Plan targets at least 40,000 hectares for reduced intensity management of the 370,000 hectares carbon rich soils under agricultural management as part of our commitment.

There is also carbon abatement potential in the rewetting of non-agricultural wetlands. This is classified Wetland - Draining and Rewetting (WDR) and comes last in the hierarchy of activities under LULUCF. This means that WDR is restricted to organic soils not reported under net afforestation, forest management, cropland management and grassland management. This hierarchy restricts WDR in many cases to former or active peat extraction areas, degraded near-natural areas or otherwise abandoned organic soils. As a result, these come under the responsibility of the National Parks and Wildlife services and Bord Na Mona to initiate carbon abatement actions in these areas.

1 <https://www.epa.ie/irelandsenvironment/environmentalindicators/>

2 <https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2018/An-Analysis-of-Abatement-Potential-of-Greenhouse-Gas-Emissions-in-Irish-Agriculture-2021-2030.pdf>

### **Agrifood Sector**

268. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he remains satisfied that the carbon reduction targets set for the agrifood

sector remain attainable without damaging the industry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28588/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Ireland is internationally recognised as having one of the most carbon efficient systems of food production in the EU, and when compared to other EU countries Ireland has a comparative advantage in grass-based carbon efficient livestock production.

Innovations unique to Ireland such as the Beef Data and Genomics Programme (BDGP), refining Economic Breeding Indexes (EBIs) for our dairy animals, producing Carbon Navigators for our dairy, beef and sheep farms; the Green Low Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme, the Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Scheme (TAMS) and initiatives such as Origin Green, Quality Assurance schemes and Knowledge Transfer Schemes all contribute to lowering the carbon footprint of the sector.

There are inherent challenges in affecting climate emission reductions in the sector and we must recognise the challenge we face as a food producing country while at the same time acknowledging that the sector should be seen as part of the solution. The Teagasc Sustainability Survey shows that the top performing third of farms emitted, on average, 9.6 kg CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent per kg beef, compared with 14.9 kg for the bottom performing third of cattle farms. Reducing this variability is a real opportunity to make progress in reducing emissions from cattle production in Ireland. This will not alone reduce our emissions but also improve economic return on these farms.

The Government's policy position for the agriculture sector is an approach to carbon neutrality which does not compromise our capacity for sustainable food production but is also cognisant of the important economical contribution agriculture makes to our economy and to the economy of rural Ireland.

There are three strands to my Department's approach to carbon neutrality:

- i. reducing agricultural emissions;
- ii. increasing carbon sequestration and
- iii. displacing and substituting fossil fuel and energy intensive materials.

Production efficiency improvements, where we seek to implement new innovations to increase output while maintaining or reducing inputs, are a core part of the efforts being undertaken by the agricultural sector. As an example of my continued focus on ensuring the lowering of the carbon footprint of the agriculture sector, I have recently launched a Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot scheme that builds on the success of the Beef Data and Genomics Programme with a funding provision of €20m in 2019. This new scheme is targeted at suckler farmers and specifically aimed at further improving the carbon efficiency of beef production.

My Department continues to review options that will enable our farmers to transition to a low carbon economy while also being aware of the need to maintain economic competitiveness and increase our agricultural output.

## **Food Imports**

269. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which food and-or food products from other jurisdictions continue to be monitored



and checked for country of origin, with particular reference to the need to ensure that all imports comply with Irish and EU standards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28589/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Food products placed on the marketplace are covered by a range of legislation designed to ensure that products supplied to consumers are of the highest safety standards. My Department plays a part in the enforcement of this legislation along with other Government departments and State Agencies such as the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) and the Health Service Executive. The FSAI is the body responsible for enforcement of regulations governing traceability, labelling and provision of food information to customers.

Labelling of food is governed by the EU food legislation on the provision of Food Information to Consumers (Regulation (EU) No. 1169/2011), which lays down strict rules on labelling of ingredients. Country of origin labelling is mandatory for certain meats and other products such as honey and wine. From 1 April 2020, it will be mandatory to indicate the country of origin of the primary ingredient (which makes up more than 50% of a food) if it is different from the country of origin of the product as a whole.

Primary responsibility under EU law for the safety and traceability of food placed on the market lies with food business operators. The role of National Competent Agencies is to verify compliance with this requirement. This is done via a combination of inspecting establishments and auditing the food safety management systems which operators have in place. These controls are applied at different stages in the food supply chain. Regulation (EC) No. 178 of 2002 sets out the general principles and requirements of EU food law and stipulates that food business operators must, at all stages of production, processing and distribution within their business, ensure food law requirements are satisfied. In regard to traceability, the regulations require that food business operators have what is referred to as the ‘one step forward, one step backward’ traceability system. There are additional requirements for certain fishery and aquaculture products under the Control Regulation (Regulation 1224/2009 and Implementing Regulation 404/2011) from first sale to subsequent stages of production, processing and distribution up to retail.

My Department has a permanent veterinary presence at all of its approved slaughter plants. Controls at plants only engaged in secondary processing are carried out at a frequency based on an annual risk assessment. An annual audit of imported products is carried out in each Department-approved plant, including checks on physical identity, labelling and documentary checks.

Extra veterinary checks are carried out on selected consignments of foods imported into DAFM-approved establishments from other EU Member States or from Third Countries outside the EU. These checks include physical checks of product condition, checks of accompanying documentation and checks of labelling and health markings.

The import of products of animal origin from third countries is governed by a comprehensive and robust legislative framework laid down at EU level, controlled by Member States in the first instance, and audited by the European Commission’s Directorate General for Health and Food Safety (formally the FVO), to ensure compliance with all of the relevant food safety standards. The legislation imposes health and supervisory requirements designed to ensure that imported products meet standards equivalent to those required for production and trade between Member States. Border Inspection Posts are operated by my Department. Import control procedures on products of animal and fish origin are highly prescriptive and strictly audited by the Directorate to ensure compliance. Inspection reports are published on the Directorate General for Health and Food Safety’s website.

I am satisfied that the controls and checks in place and enforced by my Department ensure

that Irish consumers are protected and correctly informed when they purchase and consume food products.

The FSAI has service contracts in place with the official agencies performing official controls, to verify compliance with the extensive requirements of food labelling legislation, in these establishments. The FSAI reports in detail on the number of inspections and checks carried out, and non-compliance findings.

### **Fishing Industry**

270. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he has had negotiations with the Scottish or UK authorities in regard to the resolution of outstanding issues in respect of Rockall; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28590/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Ireland does not recognise the United Kingdom's claim to sovereignty over Rockall. The waters around Rockall, including within 12 nautical miles, are part of sea area 6b, within which Irish vessels, like those of other EU Member States, have a right of access under the Common Fisheries Policy.

The Irish Government has consistently said this matter should be dealt with through diplomacy and dialogue. In that context, a process of intense engagement is now under way, led by senior Ministers from both administrations and supported by senior officials.

Our shared aim is to resolve differences over Rockall in a way which benefits both countries, and to develop further an already strong bilateral relationship

### **Agrifood Sector**

271. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his plans for growth and increased employment in the agrifood sector; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28591/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Food Wise 2025, the latest ten year strategy for the agri-food sector published in July 2015, identifies the opportunities and challenges facing the sector and provides an enabling strategy that will allow the sector to develop and prosper. Food Wise includes more than 400 specific recommendations, spread across the cross-cutting themes of sustainability, innovation, human capital, market development and competitiveness; as well as specific sectoral recommendations.

If these recommendations are implemented, the expert committee that drew up the Food Wise 2025 Strategy believes that various growth projections are achievable by 2025 including the creation of 23,000 additional jobs in the agri-food sector all along the supply chain from primary production to high value-added product development.

According to the CSO's Labour Force Survey, employment in the agri-food sector accounts for an average of 172,800 jobs in 2018 or 7.7% of total employment. Agriculture, forestry and fishing accounts for around 109,000 while the food and beverages sector employs close to 58,000, with wood and wood processing accounting for a further 6,000 jobs.

While the overall level of employment from these sectors is less than 8% of total employ-

ment nationwide, the proportion of employment outside Dublin is much greater. Census 2016 data shows that in the Border region the agri-food sector employment accounted for 14.2% of overall employment and accounted for over 12% in the south-east region.

### **Food Exports**

272. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the degree to which he expects the exports of meat and dairy products to increase in volume and value over the next five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28592/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** According to the CSO, Ireland exported almost €3.9 billion worth of meat with a volume of over 1 million tonnes, to approx. 70 countries in 2018. In 2018, Ireland exported dairy products to approximately 140 countries totalling over €4.5 billion worth of produce, an increase of over 5% by volume compared to 2017.

Opening new markets and expanding existing ones is a key part of my Department's response to the challenges and uncertainty posed by Brexit, and is in line with the market development theme of the Food Wise 2025 strategy.

My Department's market access web portal, launched earlier this year, provides a wide range of information to exporters in relation to markets and requirements. The inaugural market access report, launched on 4 March 2019, provides an overview of the substantial progress made in terms of market access to third countries for Irish food producers.

Bord Bia have undertaken a major data driven exercise to identify priority markets across the food and drink categories, which can be targeted. This exercise is providing an invaluable tool for Irish exporters and for the department and its agencies in determining the strategic priorities for agri-food trade. In relation to meat, five countries have been selected for detailed study - Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Mexico & Malaysia - and for dairy, the following countries have been identified - Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia & Vietnam

The role of my Department is to open up markets for the industry and it is then up to the industry, with the support of my Department and Bord Bia, to avail of these opportunities.

The long-term fundamentals of global meat and dairy markets are strong, with growing global demand projected from fast developing countries with increasing middle classes and more westernised diets. There is confidence that the Irish food industry is well placed to gain from the opportunity presented by this expanding global demand, underpinned by the success of our efforts and those of the Irish food industry.

### **Agri-food Sector**

273. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which Brexit proofing financial assistance remains available to agrifood producers; the degree to which individual farmers are likely to benefit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28593/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** I have introduced a number of supports to assist the agri-food sector in preparing to address the challenges posed by Brexit. These include:

- the €300 million Brexit Loan Scheme for Brexit-impacted SMEs and mid-cap businesses. The funding arrangements ensure that at least 40% of the fund is available to food businesses. Up to 14 June 2019, 585 applications have been approved. The total number of loans progressed to sanction at bank level is 141, with a total value of €30.6m, of which 29, with a value of €8.2m, relate to food businesses;

- a market prioritisation exercise undertaken by Bord Bia to identify priority markets across all food and drinks categories;

- tailored supports and analysis are being provided to food companies through Bord Bia's Brexit Barometer;

- an intensified series of trade missions to develop and grow new markets;

- the recently launched DBEI/DAFM "Future Growth Loan Scheme" will bring up to €300 million of long-term strategic investment loans available to eligible Irish businesses, including farmers and the agri-food & seafood sectors. The fund is leveraged by exchequer funding of €62 million, of which 40%, or some €25 million, has been provided by my Department. Businesses have been able to apply for loan eligibility through the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) since 17th April 2019.

I also have had ongoing discussions with Commissioner Hogan regarding the potential impact of a disorderly Brexit. The Commission have already made €50m available to Irish beef farmers as a response to market pressures, and this can be matched by national funding. I expect to be rolling out a support scheme with this funding in the very near future. I have also stressed the need for the Commission to be ready to deploy a further range of measures to mitigate the potential impacts on the agri-food and fisheries sector. Avoiding a no-deal Brexit continues to be the Government's overriding policy priority.

And, of course, our practical preparations for all potential scenarios, including a no-deal Brexit, continue to be progressed and refined through the whole-of-Government coordination structures that have been in place for some time.

## **Fishing Industry**

274. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which fish stocks remain sufficiently high to ensure the future and viability of the fishing sector here now and in the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28594/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) provides the framework for the long term conservation and sustainability of fish stocks around our shores and is designed to ensure the long term sustainability of fishing in Ireland and throughout EU waters. The CFP specifically calls for the progressive restoration and maintenance of populations of fish stocks above biomass levels capable of producing Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY). To achieve this, the FMSY exploitation rate shall be achieved for all stocks by 2020 at the latest. This should ultimately lead to healthy fish stocks, higher quotas for both Irish and EU fishermen and lead to more sustainable fishing patterns.

Scientific information on the state of the fisheries exploited by the Irish fleet is compiled by the Marine Institute and is published in the Stock Book each year. The most recent Stock Book, 2018, contains 74 stocks that are subject to the scientific advice of the Marine Institute. From the 74 stocks, 32 are assessed as being sustainably fished in 2018. This number has grown every

year since 2013. This in turn leads to the number of stocks being over fished declining from 22 in 2014 to 16 in 2018.

The 2018 December Fisheries Council, at which quotas for 2019 were agreed on the basis of a proposal produced by the European Commission that is informed by the best available scientific advice, showed a rebuilding of many stocks. I was pleased that the scientific advice supported large increases in a number of stocks of importance such as Haddock (+20%), Hake (+28%) and Megrims (+47%) in the Celtic Sea. The overall increase of 30% in whitefish quota will provide improved fishing opportunities for whitefish fishermen all around our coasts. This shows that the many years of intensive, industry led conservation measures are paying off.

I am confident that, through the CFP, we will be able to ensure the sustainability of our fish stocks and in turn the economic viability of our fishing fleet and fish processors, thereby supporting the families and communities that depend on a vibrant fishing industry.

### **Agrifood Sector**

275. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he continues to encourage new markets for Irish food and food products, with particular reference to switching to new markets in the aftermath of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28595/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The pursuit and development of new markets for Irish agri-food exports is a constant and central component of the strategic development of the industry, as evidenced by its placement at the centre of Food Wise 2025, the industry's strategy for development. It has become even more important in recent times given the need to diversify our markets and reduce our reliance on traditional destinations such as the UK.

Against the backdrop of EU-agreed trade deals with Canada, Japan and Mexico, my Department will continue its efforts to open new markets while further deepening trade with existing markets for Irish agri-food exporters.

For example, in 2018, it facilitated the decision of the Chinese authorities to open their market to Irish beef imports by listing a number of approved Irish beef establishments. Other notable achievements during 2018 were agreements with Qatar and Kuwait which allowed for the importation of Irish beef, sheepmeat and poultry to their markets. In April 2019, we saw the opening of the Ukrainian market for Irish beef and pork. During my June trade mission to Japan, an agreement was reached in principle to allow access for Irish sheepmeat. This development followed the announcement last month of the removal of the under-30 months restriction for Irish beef exports to Japan. This means that all Irish beef is now eligible for export to this very valuable market.

Trade Missions also play an important role in this regard, building a network of Governmental, Official and Industry contacts which assist in gaining and then developing a presence in many global markets. In 2018, I led successful missions to the US, Canada, China, Indonesia and Malaysia.

In 2019, an extensive trade mission itinerary is being pursued. So far this year, I have visited Turkey and China followed by an extensive mission to Japan and South Korea in June. My next scheduled trade mission is to Algeria and Egypt in November. These missions include participants from across the agri-food sector and feature extensive interactions between industry and officials with their counterparts as well as high-level political discussions.



Overall, agri-food exports to countries outside the EU have increased from around €2.7 billion to €3.6 billion in the period 2014 to 2018. This represents very rapid growth of 36% in that four-year timeframe.

### **Farm Data**

276. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which he continues to monitor the cost of farm production inputs with a view to maintaining a livelihood for farm families into the future; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28596/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** My Department continually monitors the cost of farm production inputs by using the most recent data available from both national and international sources.

Official statistics on farm inputs are compiled by the Central Statistics Office (CSO). These statistics are reported on by the CSO in various publications and are available on their website. Departmental publications such as the Annual Review and Outlook 2018 also report on the costs of farm inputs. Farm output costs, input costs and margins also receive detailed examination each year by Teagasc in their National Farm Survey. International sources used to monitor farm inputs include, Eurostat, the Food and Agriculture Organisation and OECD.

In June 2019, the CSO released its Final Estimate of Output, Input and Income in Agriculture for 2018. This shows that aggregate farm income (operating surplus) decreased by 17% to €2,849 million in 2018. However, this follows an increase of 30% in 2017 against 2016 figures. The overall value of goods output increased by 1.2%, or €96m, to €8,182m. Intermediate consumption increased by €690 million (13%) over 2017, to €6,001 million. The main items giving rise to this increase are feeding stuffs and fertilisers, which increased by €356 million (+27%) and €69 million (+13%) respectively.

Each month, the CSO issue the Agricultural Price Indices outlining the changes in output and input indices for a range of agricultural products. In their most recent release issued in mid-June covering the period up to April 2019, the CSO indicated that the agricultural output price index increased by 0.3% in April 2019 compared with March 2019. On an annual basis, the agricultural output price index was up 0.9% in April 2019 compared with April 2018. The agricultural input price index increased by 0.1% in April 2019 compared with March 2019. The resulting terms of trade index for the month increased by 0.3% in April 2019. On an annual basis, the agricultural input price index increased by 4.9% in April 2019 compared with April 2018.

### **Food Industry Data**

277. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the degree to which objectives and targets as set out by Food Harvest 2020 and Food Wise 2025 are being achieved; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28597/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The main targets set out in the Food Harvest report published in 2010 were, by 2020, to increase the value of primary output by 33% and agri-food exports by 40% (both from a 2007-09 average baseline); and to increase value added production by 40% (from a 2008 baseline).

Progress on those targets is monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis. The latest data



available shows that these targets have been met. There has been growth of 50% for primary production and 49% for exports (based on 2018 data), and 47% for value-added (latest available data 2016).

Food Wise 2025, the latest ten year strategy for the agri-food sector published in July 2015, is the successor to the Food Harvest strategy. It identifies the opportunities and challenges facing the sector and provides an enabling strategy that will allow the sector to develop and prosper. Food Wise includes more than 400 specific recommendations, spread across the cross-cutting themes of sustainability, innovation, human capital, market development and competitiveness; as well as specific sectoral recommendations.

If these recommendations are implemented, the expert committee which drew up the Food Wise 2025 Strategy believed that the following growth projections are achievable by 2025: increasing the value of agri-food exports by 85% to €19 billion; increasing value added in the sector by 70% to in excess of €13 billion; and increasing the value of primary production by 65% to almost €10 billion. With regard to employment, Food Wise foresees the creation of 23,000 additional jobs in the agri-food sector all along the supply chain from primary production to high value added product development.

In July 2018, I launched the third annual progress report of Food Wise 2025, Steps to Success 2018. This showed that by 2017 exports had increased by 15.9% and primary production by 8.9% compared to the baseline.

As of Q1 2019, of the 376 detailed actions which were due to commence by 2019 or are ongoing actions; 81% have been achieved or substantial action has been undertaken; and a further 19% have commenced and are progressing well.

## Food Promotion

278. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the extent to which the market for venison remains viable at home and abroad; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28598/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Deer farming in Ireland is an alternative enterprise which is dependent on the dynamics of supply and demand which affect all agricultural production systems. In 1996, there were approximately 500 deer farms with 20,000 deer in Ireland, but numbers have declined sharply since that time.

Today, there are only a small number of farmers in Ireland actively supplying deer for meat production, which cater primarily to specialised niche markets. The sector is reliant upon producers and companies ensuring that a market exists for their product, an objective which Bord Bia assists in by identifying and developing potential market outlets.

Growth in the past was achieved as a result of improved distribution for game meats, especially in supermarkets. Game and exotic meats historically occupy a premium, niche segment of the meat market. Whilst there are opportunities to compete with the larger premium segment of the red meat/poultry categories, it is important to note that demand is seasonal, with the greatest concentration of retail shelf space dedicated to game in the Winter/Christmas period.

My Department has approved one factory for the slaughter of deer in Ireland, and two game-handling plants. There may also be outlets for processing of venison in Local Authority approved plants, but this would be a matter for the Local Authority concerned.

## **Greyhound Industry**

279. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on the content broadcast in a programme (details supplied) regarding the greyhound sector; if existing welfare legislation and enforcement provisions will be re-examined to ensure they are fit for purpose; the primary and secondary legislation in operation with respect to welfare and sanctioning; and the sanctions involved for breach of provisions and prohibited activities in the legislation. [28601/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The programme referred to by the Deputy contained evidence of practices that are completely unacceptable from an animal welfare perspective. My Department takes any allegations of breaches of animal welfare rules very seriously and will thoroughly investigate and take the necessary enforcement and other action to deal with such offences.

In particular, my Department is engaging in a review of the licensing conditions in knackeries, with regard to practices seen on the programme. All allegations will be fully examined to determine the appropriate actions.

The Greyhound Sector has undergone a series of reforms in recent times, most notable when the Greyhound Racing Act 2019 was signed by the President on the 28th May 2019. The drafting of this legislation strengthens the legal basis for the industry, with a view to fortifying the integrity of the greyhound racing sector and improving provision for greyhound traceability.

My Department has a strong and consistent record regarding the enforcement of animal welfare rules, including the review of 100 years of animal welfare legislation, leading to the enactment of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013.

A total of 73 successful prosecutions have been taken under the Act since it was brought in, with a further 30 prosecution files currently being processed for welfare abuses.

## **Bord na gCon**

280. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will publish a business analysis report prepared for an organisation (details supplied) by another organisation as reported in a programme; and when the report in question was completed and submitted to his Department. [28602/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** Bord na gCon is a commercial state body, established under the Greyhound Industry Act, 1958 chiefly to control greyhound racing and to improve and develop the greyhound industry. Bord na gCon is a body corporate and a separate legal entity to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Bord na gCon has informed me that the report in question, which was commissioned by Bord na gCon's interim CEO in early 2017, was completed on 29 September 2017 and was received by my Department on 24th May 2019.

I understand that the document has been published on Bord na gCon's official website in recent days in a redacted form.

## **State Bodies**

281. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when he last met the Chief Executive Officer and-or Chairperson of Irish National Stud; the issues that were discussed; when he expects to next meet the Chief Executive Officer and or Chairperson; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28606/19]

**Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Michael Creed):** The Irish National Stud Company is a commercial State Body.

I last met the chairperson of the Irish National Stud, on Tuesday 11th April 2017. The items discussed during the meeting were an update on the financial performance of the stud, the recruitment of a new Chief Executive Officer, the establishment of a tourist orientated visitor centre and the setting up of a subsidiary company.

I have also met both the Chair and the CEO of the Irish National Stud at a number of industry events, including the Equine Summits held November 2017 and in April 2018.

My officials are in regular contact with officials at the Irish National stud. My Secretary General met the Chair in May 2019 and there are regular governance meetings at official level throughout the year.

### **National Oil Reserves Agency Data**

282. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the current rate of the National Oil Reserves Agency levy; and the annual revenue raised by the levy in each year since 2007, in tabular form. [28342/19]

283. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the sources of revenue that comprise the total revenue collected through the National Oil Reserve Agency levy; and the percentage paid by oil producers and normal consumers and so on in each year since 2007, in tabular form. [28343/19]

284. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the National Oil Reserve Agency levy is an Exchequer revenue source; and, if so, if the reallocation of the levy to the climate action fund will have an impact on the Exchequer. [28344/19]

285. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the National Oil Reserve Agency levy is collected in a non-Exchequer fund; if so, the amount of revenue accumulated in the fund; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28345/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 282 to 285, inclusive, together.

The National Oil Reserves Agency (NORA) is a non-commercial State body under the aegis of my Department with responsibility for the maintenance of Ireland's strategic oil reserves. NORA is funded through a levy placed on the sale of most oil products. The current rate of the NORA levy is 2 cent per litre, having been set at this rate in 2009. Oil Companies are liable for payment of this levy when oil is placed on the market. However, I understand that the levy is passed on to consumers, both retail and commercial, when purchasing oil. The annual revenue from the NORA levy from 2007 to 2018 was as follows:

Year	Annual Revenue
2018	€134,185,000
2017	€130,410,000
2016	€131,766,000
2015	€130,380,000
2014	€121,337,000
2013	€123,420,257
2012	€122,755,088
2011	€129,664,352
2010	€139,711,142
2009	€93,327,372
2008	€81,367,837
2007	€46,708,092

NORA levy monies are paid directly by the oil companies to NORA and not to the Exchequer.

Prior to 2009, the NORA levy was 1c per litre of product. This was not sufficient to meet NORA's expenses, including the purchase of oil stocks for use in an emergency, and a very considerable level of borrowing had built up. The levy was increased from 1 cent to 2 cent in 2009, primarily to manage and repay this debt, but also to build up stocks and secure additional storage, both within Ireland and abroad, to ensure Ireland held its 90-day obligation in physical stocks.

By April 2017 NORA had repaid all its outstanding debt obligations (€444m in 2009) and now meets Ireland's oil stockholding obligations fully with physical stock. NORA was debt free throughout 2018.

The company's closing cash balance at 31st December 2018 was €183.9m. This will be used for:

- a) NORA's ongoing financing requirements and commitments;
- b) the purchase of additional oil stocks associated with planned changes in storage contract arrangements, including stock to be purchased in 2020 and held at the ESB-owned oil storage site at Poolbeg, which has been refurbished by NORA.

Government approved the establishment of the Climate Action Fund (CAF), to be funded by the excess of receipts over costs from the NORA levy, to support projects that will help towards reducing Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions. Legislative proposals are currently being designed for the repurposing of the NORA levy to include meeting NORA's expenses, and to provide future financing to the CAF. As NORA levy funding is not paid to the Exchequer, the repurposing of a portion of this funding for the CAF will have no impact on the Exchequer.

### Sale of State Assets

286. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount received from the privatisation of Telecom Éireann including all subsidiaries in 1999; the costs incurred in the privatisation; the net proceeds from same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28317/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** While files from the then Department of Public Enterprise for the period in question will have been archived, details regarding this matter were presented at a meeting of the Public Accounts Committee on 7 December 2000 in respect of the 1999 Annual Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General and Appropriation Accounts 1999 for Vote 32. These details include the following: in 1996 20% of Telecom Éireann's shares were sold as part of a strategic alliance with Comsource an entity owned by KPN Telecom BV of the Netherlands (60%) and Telia AB of Sweden (40%). An additional 15% of shares were acquired by this entity along with the transfer of 14.9% of the shares to employees before the Initial Public Offering (IPO) of Telecom Éireann shares in 1999. These transactions yielded over IE£ 1.5 billion (€1.9 billion) to the State from the sale of shares to Comsource. The State received an additional IE£190 million (€241.25 million) from the share allocation to staff. In 1999 The State received IE £3.3 billion (€4.19 billion) in the Initial Public Offering (IPO) for Telecom Éireann.

In total, the Exchequer received IE£5 billion for the total sale of Telecom Éireann shares, and the costs of the flotation were IE£76.9 million (€97.64 million).

### State Bodies Data

287. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the amount the ESB group invested in the electricity distribution, transmission in networks upgrades, extensions, operations, and routine maintenance in the period 1999 to 2018; the amount it paid as dividend to the Exchequer; the amount borrowed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28320/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** While day to day financial matters relating to the ESB Group, including the amounts invested in electricity distribution and transmission, networks upgrades, extensions, operations or routine maintenance, are primarily a matter for the Board and management of ESB, I have requested ESB to revert to the Deputy directly with the historical information sought, where available. The most up-to-date financial information is contained in ESB Annual Report and Accounts 2018 which is available on the ESB website.

With regards to dividends paid, the ESB Group paid a dividend of some €35m for the financial year ended 31 December 2018, of which some €33.4 was paid to the Exchequer and the remainder to the Employee Share Ownership Plan (ESOP).

### National Development Plan

288. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the intended spending on each renewable energy source of the €13.7 billion that is to be attracted from private sources as part of the National Development Plan. [28321/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Project Ireland 2040 sets out investments to provide for population growth in a compact, connected and sustainable way. It will deliver important infrastructures and contribute to meeting our climate ambitions as set out in the recently launched Climate Action Plan. Exchequer funding of €7.6 billion, together with investment of €13.7 billion by commercial State bodies will ensure a step change in strategic climate change investments in the areas of transport, agriculture, energy and the built environment over the next decade.



As part of the transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient society, €14.2 Billion has been allocated under the National Development Plan 2018 - 2027. Of this, €500 million has been allocated to the Climate Action Fund. In excess of €13 Billion will come from Commercial State owned enterprises under my Department's aegis and will also play a crucial role in climate action initiatives.

Major investment projects by inter alia, ESB, EirGrid, and Bord na Mona will include the following areas:

Enhanced electricity interconnection, including the Celtic Interconnector to France and further interconnection to the UK,

Conversion of Moneypoint electricity generation plant to end the burning of coal by 2025.

Expansion of refuelling network for alternately fuelled vehicles to address freight emissions,

Conversion of peat power plants to more sustainable low-carbon technologies by 2030,

Roll-out of the National Smart Energy Metering programme to commence in 2019,

Development of gas infrastructure projects to support regional and rural development and the low-carbon transition, and

On-going reinforcement of the existing power grid.

### **Waste Management**

289. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he will report on the launch of a new labelling system for waste recycling; the reason the labels he introduced are being used only on a voluntary basis by producers and retailers; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28339/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I launched a new labelling system, unique to Ireland, on 21 June 2019 to help make it easier for people to recycle. Proper segregation of waste is crucial. It minimises the amount of waste ending up in landfill and helps us use our resources more effectively. The three new labels are voluntary for use by producers, manufacturers and retailers. The labels clearly identify whether an item is widely recycled, whether it is not recyclable, and whether more information should be sought before deciding how to dispose of it. This is just one of a number of initiatives to help people to recycle, including the development of a single nationwide list of recyclable materials which may be placed in the household recycling bin, and the launch of the website mywaste.ie to advise householders on all aspects of how to prevent and manage their waste. These new labels, which have been developed in partnership with the Regional Waste Management Planning Offices, will clearly show when to recycle or dispose of an item and I encourage all retailers, manufacturers and producers to take up this useful initiative.

Major retailers have expressed interest in the new labelling system, and it is being rolled out free of charge to producers, manufacturers and retailers. More information about the labels and how to apply is available on mywaste.ie.

Subscription to the scheme has been kept as voluntary because the European Commission has warned of the risk of market fragmentation when Member States take measures in an uncoordinated manner, which differ in scope, focus and ambition level. This can lead to a variety



of restrictions of market access among Member States, barriers to the free movement of goods and to the level playing field between producers in different countries.

### **Construction Regulations**

290. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has responded to requests by an organisation (details supplied) that crushed concrete should be reused as an aggregate on existing projects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28340/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** Article 28 of the European Communities (Waste Directive) Regulations, S.I. No. 126 of 2011, sets out the grounds by which a material which is recovered or recycled from waste, such as crushed concrete, can be deemed to be no longer a waste. As the designated competent authority, decisions regarding applications for end-of-waste status are the responsibility of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

In June 2018, my Department established a Construction Waste Resource Group comprising key Construction and Demolition sector and Waste sector stakeholders, including policy, regulatory and industry representatives to provide a valuable platform to discuss and monitor construction and demolition (C&D) waste issues arising, including the capacity of the sector to manage C&D waste.

The issue of end-of-waste status for certain materials, including crushed concrete, has been discussed at each of the three meetings of this Resource Group, including the most recent meeting which took place on 19th June 2019. My officials, in conjunction with representatives of the EPA, have reminded those present that end-of-waste decisions can only be made once industry has submitted comprehensive applications to the EPA and satisfied the EPA that a decision to grant end-of waste status is appropriate.

### **Renewable Energy Generation Targets**

291. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his views on a matter regarding the national broadband plan (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28347/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I recently launched the Climate Action Plan which includes a suite of actions to decarbonise the electricity sector and boost the quantity of renewable generation in order to meet our target of 70% of demand from renewable sources by 2030. In order to deliver on the ambition set out in the Climate Plan, my Department is developing the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS). The RESS will be characterised by a series of renewable electricity auctions, aligned with the ambition set out in the Climate Action Plan and the final National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP).

The RESS is now in the detailed design and implementation phase and my Department is progressing the RESS project across a number of key work streams including the EU State Aid approval process; the development of an Enabling Framework for Community Participation; and the design of the first RESS auctions. A working group and steering group have been established with the Commission for Regulation of Utilities and EirGrid to oversee the implementation of the RESS auctions and harness existing expertise in this area. It is expected that

the first RESS auction will open for applications by the end of 2019. Engagement with relevant stakeholders including the European Commission's Directorate-General (DG) for Competition, will continue in the coming months but the formal opening of the Scheme will be subject to state aid approval.

As set out in the Climate Action Plan, it is my intention that corporate contracting of renewable energy sources (via Corporate Power Purchase Agreements or CPPAs) will provide 15% of the required generation to meet Ireland's 2030 renewable electricity target.

CPPAs have potential to provide a route to market for renewable project developers in the shorter term, boosting Ireland's renewable energy capacity in advance of the formal commencement of RESS. The Plan includes a suite of actions to develop effective policy tools that can kick start corporate PPAs in Ireland and deliver on our RES-E targets at no extra cost to the public.

### **Renewable Energy Generation**

292. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the fact that a gap of one year of renewable energy generation will potentially be lost if RESS is delayed further; the steps he is taking to ensure that there are no further delays with same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28359/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I recently launched the Climate Action Plan which includes a suite of actions to decarbonise the electricity sector and boost the quantity of renewable generation in order to meet our target of 70% of demand from renewable sources by 2030. In order to deliver on the ambition set out in the Climate Plan, my Department is developing the Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS). The RESS will be characterised by a series of renewable electricity auctions, aligned with the ambition set out in the Climate Action Plan and the final National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP). The RESS is now in the detailed design and implementation phase and my Department is progressing the RESS project across a number of key work streams including the EU State Aid approval process; the development of an Enabling Framework for Community Participation; and the design of the first RESS auctions. A working group and steering group have been established with the Commission for Regulation of Utilities and EirGrid to oversee the implementation of the RESS auctions and harness existing expertise in this area. It is expected that the first RESS auction will open for applications by the end of 2019. Engagement with relevant stakeholders including the European Commission's Directorate-General (DG) for Competition, will continue in the coming months but the formal opening of the Scheme will be subject to state aid approval.

As set out in the Climate Action Plan, it is my intention that corporate contracting of renewable energy sources (via Corporate Power Purchase Agreements or CPPAs) will provide 15% of the required generation to meet Ireland's 2030 renewable electricity target. CPPAs have potential to provide a route to market for renewable project developers in the shorter term, boosting Ireland's renewable energy capacity in advance of the formal commencement of RESS. The Plan includes a suite of actions to develop effective policy tools that can kick start corporate PPAs in Ireland and deliver on our RES-E targets at no extra cost to the public.

### **Climate Change Policy**

293. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the projected rate of return on climate action fund investment projects both individually and an average; and if the investments made in seven relevant projects are intended to be long-term or short-term investments. [28412/19]

294. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if the €300 million in private financing leveraged by investments from the climate action fund includes the €77 million invested by the fund. [28413/19]

295. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the projected resources in the climate action fund in each year out to 2030; and the sources of revenue that will contribute to that fund in each year in tabular form. [28414/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 293 to 295, inclusive, together.

The Government has established the Climate Action Fund with the objective of funding initiatives that contribute to the achievement of Ireland's climate and energy targets in a cost effective manner. It may also support innovative interventions in these sectors.

In November 2018, I announced seven successful projects from the first Call for Applications under the Climate Action Fund. Up to €77m in grant aid will be provided to these projects leveraging a total investment, including grant aid, of €300m. Effectively the Fund is leveraging €3 for every €1 it provides.

As the support provided to these projects is in the form of grant aid, as opposed to a financial investment that will be repaid, there is no associated rate of return for the Climate Action Fund.

The Climate Action Fund will provide €500 million support to projects over the period of the National Development Plan. The sources of funding include the use of unspent monies in the Energy Efficiency Fund and the excess of receipts over costs from the existing petroleum products levy (commonly called the National Oil Reserves Agency (NORA) levy).

There is a total of €15 million funding from the Energy Efficiency Fund which is available for use from 2019. The annual contributions to the fund from the NORA levy are projected to be circa €60 million on average per annum from 2020. The exact level of funding in each year has yet to be determined. Legislative proposals are currently being designed for the repurposing of the NORA levy to include meeting NORA's expenses, and to provide future financing to the Climate Action Fund.

### **Waste Disposal**

296. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the action he plans to take to reduce the amount of plastic and other packaging waste that consumers are forced to take with them in supermarkets; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28438/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I am determined to introduce reforms in order to promote reduction, reuse, recycling and optimal final disposal options, in line with the principles of the "circular economy", which seeks to promote the sustainable use of the resources of our planet. In particular I see opportunities for industry and consumers to respond and make positive changes to how we use plastic and other packaging.

Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2019 has ten dedicated actions which focus on waste and the Circular Economy. Our focus will be on designing out waste, prioritising prevention of waste at every opportunity through eco-design, reuse and repair, market restriction and levies.

Ireland is working closely with other Member States in the European Union. We are working on the development of policy instruments which shall include:

- Regulatory changes;
- Market incentives;
- Promotion, labelling and the provision of information on sustainable practices;
- Developmental work with the sector to improve our capacity to deliver our goals.

Included in the regulatory changes will be the amended Waste Framework Directive which promotes the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) model and aims to make it more effective through minimum common requirements.

As part of the Climate Action Plan, we will identify opportunities to strengthen the regulatory and enforcement frameworks and structures for the waste collection and management system, to maximise the collection of clean, segregated materials for reuse and/or recycling from all households and businesses, and to incentivise consumers to reduce, reuse and recycle.

The Climate Action Plan also commits to regulating and incentivising producers of waste, particularly packaging, to ensure the prevention of waste and the use of recycled materials in packaging product. The Plan states that the following steps will be necessary to deliver this action:

- Q3 2019: Pilot eco-modulation fees for packaging
- Q2 2020: New Packaging Waste Directive transposition
- Q1 2021: Implementation of full eco-modulated fees for packaging

A core opportunity for improving EPR measures is to develop economic incentives which favour circular products and business models.

Ahead of this, Repak members are taking steps to prevent and minimise the amount of packaging they require. With the assistance of the EPA, Repak's Prevent and Save initiative has worked with Irish business to reduce packaging and to promote packaging improvements across industry. Under the initiative, specialist packaging technologists look for ways to optimise the packaging used and to minimise any resulting packaging waste. Further information can be found on [www.repak.ie/preventandsave](http://www.repak.ie/preventandsave). However, it should also be noted that packaging is used by producers and retailers to protect and preserve goods and can help in preventing food and other product waste.

Under current Packaging Regulations, at least 60% of packaging waste must be recovered and 55% must be recycled. Repak is the approved producer responsibility compliance scheme for packaging in Ireland and it is tasked with meeting recovery and recycling targets established under the EU Packaging Directive. Repak recently confirmed that their members achieved an overall recycling rate of 68% for all materials and is ahead of the EU targets by 13%. Ireland's official statistics are compiled by the EPA and will be published shortly. It is anticipated they will show that Ireland has continued to meet and exceeded the overall packaging waste recovery rate and the recycling rate targets since they came into force. The task ahead of Ireland now is to meet the increased targets that will come into force under the CELP.

**Postal Services**

297. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when he received the report from An Post on the closure of the mail centre in County Cork; the analysis undertaken in his Department regarding the decision; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28516/19]

298. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when the report recommending the closure of the mail centre in County Cork will be published; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28517/19]

299. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when he and his officials were informed regarding the closure of the mail centre in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28519/19]

300. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he was informed of the deployment options for the staff in relation to the closure of the mail centre in County Cork; the location of the options; the likely uptake of same; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28520/19]

301. **Deputy Micheál Martin** asked the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if he has been requested to meet a union (details supplied) in relation to the closure of the mail centre in County Cork; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28521/19]

**Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment (Deputy Richard Bruton):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 297 to 301, inclusive, together.

An Post is a commercial State company with its own Board and has a mandate to deliver a viable postal delivery service and post office network. The management and operation of the company is an operational matter for the Board and management of An Post.

In recommending a 2% pay increase from 1 July 2017 in An Post, the Labour Court also recommended that a number of efficiency measures be implemented in order to fund 50% of the cost of the pay increase. One of those measures related to the conclusion of discussions in relation to An Post's proposal to reduce the size of its mail processing network. The Recommendation provides that 50% of the savings arising from the closure of a Mails Processing Centre will contribute towards the Union's cost of the pay award.

An Post has advised that there was no specific report in relation to the closure of the Cork Mail Centre although there were reports from a number of sources, including international consultants, which helped An Post make a decision on the matter.

My Department was informed of the decision to close Cork Mail Centre on Tuesday, 25 June 2019.

An Post has given a commitment that all staff will be offered strong exit packages, redeployment opportunities within An Post's delivery and Post Office networks in the Cork area (currently employing nearly 1000 people), further education grants and support in securing jobs with new employers. In addition, all relevant State supports will be made available to the workers impacted by the closure of the Mail Centre.

I have not received a request to meet the union in question and it is a matter for the company and the union directly. I understand that An Post has, and is continuing to, engage with the union to ensure the best possible outcome for affected staff.



## Transport Policy

302. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the measures he is considering to incentivise a move towards more environmentally friendly HGVs such as Euro 6 engines (details supplied); and if the grants and scrappage schemes are being considered. [28470/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** According to the most recent emission inventory from the EPA and using the SEAI energy balance, it is estimated that heavy-duty vehicles contributed just under 19% of the total land transport emissions in 2017, second only to emissions from private passenger cars. The Deputy correctly notes that diesel technology has become progressively cleaner and greener over the past decade with the introduction of each improving Euro-class standard. Euro VI-class engines demonstrably emit fewer harmful air pollutants such as NOX and PMs. Notwithstanding that progress, a transition away from the use of fossil fuels towards alternative fuels in the heavy-duty sector will be required in the coming years to reduce our growing freight emissions.

My Department is working closely with that of Minister Bruton to encourage this transition, and an interdepartmental Low Emission Vehicle (LEV) Taskforce was jointly convened to consider the range of options available to Government to accelerate the take-up of low-carbon technologies. While electric technology in the heavy-duty sector is not as well developed as in the light-duty sector, this is rapidly changing as the market matures; large vehicles such as electric trucks have been sold in other jurisdictions, indicating that electricity may become a more feasible option for the heavy-duty sector in the longer term. Of course, electric vehicles are not the only alternative fuel or technology available to reduce transport emissions; the *National Policy Framework for Alternative Fuels Infrastructure in Ireland*, published by my Department in 2017, outlined a potential role for other fuels and technologies, including hydrogen, biofuels and natural gas/biogas. Phase 2 of the LEV Taskforce which is considering these alternative fuels, amongst others, is ongoing. It is expected that the Taskforce will submit recommendations in this regard to Government as part of the 2020 Budget and Estimates Process. The role of incentives, such as those mentioned by the Deputy, will be considered in this context.

Over the coming years, further steps will be needed to help move towards decarbonisation of the freight sector and, more broadly, towards meeting our national emissions targets. The *Climate Action Plan* indicates potential pathways to achieving this. Action 83 of the Climate Action Plan indicates a commitment to consider the introduction of an emissions-based VRT and motor tax for light goods vehicles and heavy goods vehicles. The Deputy will be aware that responsibility for taxation, and consequently for implementation of this action, rests with the Department of Finance.

## Road Safety

303. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of research by the Road Safety Authority into e-scooters and other such vehicles; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28349/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Road Safety Authority's review of current practice and safety implications of electric personal mobility devices was submitted to me in late June.

The publication of the report is a matter for the Road Safety Authority, in consultation with my Department, once I have made a decision on the way forward in relation to electric scooters.



Until then, the report forms part of the deliberative process and will not be published until this has concluded.

### **Transport Policy**

304. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress of outcomes of trials of low emission buses being conducted by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28350/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The operational phase of the low-emission bus trials has now concluded and the findings are currently being assessed. I expect that summary findings will be made available by my Department in the coming weeks and will be happy to advise the Deputy of same.

More generally, my Department is also reviewing public transport policy to ensure that services are sustainable into the future and are meeting the needs of a modern economy. One strand of the work under this review is considering the range of low- and zero-emission fuels and technologies which are currently commercially available for the urban bus market, and I expect that this analysis will also further inform Ireland's medium and longer term technology procurement decisions for the public bus fleets, alongside the findings of the vehicle trials.

### **Cycling Facilities Provision**

305. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the new and additional cycle routes completed to date in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28351/19]

306. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding allocated on new and additional cycle routes in each of the years 2015 to 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28352/19]

307. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the funding allocated to the upgrade and improvement of existing cycle lanes in each of the years 2015 to 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28353/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 305 to 307, inclusive, together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport, including active travel. The National Transport Authority (NTA) allocates the funding at a project level.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have therefore referred the Deputy's questions to the Authority for a more detailed reply. Please contact my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

### **Road Network**

308. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress made to implement a variable speed limit regime on the M50 to improve its operational

efficiency by smoothing traffic flow; when this measure will be fully implemented; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28354/19]

309. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress made on the implementation of lane control signalling on the M50 to facilitate the rapid deployment of lane closures in order to protect road users and emergency services during an incident on the route; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28355/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 308 and 309 together.

A critical factor in implementing a new Variable Speed Limit regime and the ability to deploy lane closures is the need to enact legislation which will underpin the new proposals. Arising from the prioritisation of urgent legislation to address some of the risks consequent on the UK's intention to leave the European Union, it has not been possible to progress the legislation as quickly as originally intended. However the Department continues to work on the required legislation.

It is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) to implement improvements to infrastructure on the M50 to facilitate a Variable Speed Limit regime and the deployment of lane closures. As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design and upgrading of individual national roads is a matter for TII in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the questions to TII for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### **Cycling Policy**

310. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport when the analysis of the National Cycling Policy Framework will be published as part of the review of public transport policy by his Department; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28356/19]

329. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress made in implementing policy 19.1 of the National Cycle Policy Framework (details supplied). [28472/19]

330. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress made in implementing policy 18.8 of the National Cycle Policy Framework (details supplied). [28473/19]

331. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress made in implementing policy 18.7 of the National Cycle Policy Framework (details supplied). [28474/19]

332. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress made in implementing policy 17.3 of the National Cycle Policy Framework (details supplied). [28475/19]

333. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress made in implementing policy 17.4 of the National Cycle Policy Framework (details

supplied). [28476/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 310 and 329 to 333, inclusive, together.

As the Deputy may be aware, in the coming weeks and in line with a *Programme for a Partnership Government* commitment, I will seek the public's views on public transport and active travel policy. This review will allow all stakeholders to reflect on what has been achieved, what remains to be done and how our policy frameworks can support the realisation of a more sustainable transport system.

The review is premised on the concept of integrated and sustainable transport, in keeping with the objectives of *Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Transport Future* which formed the overarching policy backdrop to the development of the *National Cycling Policy Framework*. As part of the overall review therefore, analysis of the *National Cycling Policy Framework* and the implementation status of its actions is being conducted and will be published as part of the overall review.

Last year, as part of this review I hosted a Public Transport Stakeholder Forum in the Mansion House at which representatives from a broad spectrum of interest groups in the wider public and sustainable transport sector attended, including those representing cyclists.

I look forward to engagement by the general public and all stakeholders with the forthcoming consultation process and welcome their views in relation to the both public transport and active travel as a mode of transport.

### **Railway Stations**

311. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if his attention has been drawn to the fact that Kishogue train station will not be open and operational until the end of 2020; if he is satisfied with this progress; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28357/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the Deputy is aware, the National Transport Authority (NTA) has statutory responsibility for the planning and development of public transport infrastructure in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA).

I very much welcome the integrated approach toward land-use planning and public transport provision as exemplified within the Clonburris Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) planning scheme.

The NTA, in collaboration with South Dublin County Council, developed the Transport Assessment and Transport Strategy which underpins the Planning Scheme for Clonburris SDZ, and a key public transport element of that strategy is of course the opening of Kishogue Railway Station.

The Deputy is aware that the planning scheme for the SDZ was only approved by An Bord Pleanála in May and that the Council is now preparing a consolidated planning scheme, incorporating the modifications made by the Board, and this consolidated planning scheme will be used by the planning authority in assessing future planning applications within the SDZ.

I have been advised by the NTA, as has the Deputy, that the NTA currently envisages the station opening at the end of 2020. As I have stated already, the planning and development of

public transport infrastructure is a statutory function of the NTA.

The Deputy will be aware that improvements have already been introduced for existing residents in the wider Lucan South area through improved train services using the Adamstown station, which has park and ride facilities, and significantly increased services on both of the major bus routes in the area which were introduced in late March.

### **Motor Insurance Data**

312. **Deputy John Curran** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the progress made regarding the establishment of a motor insurance database; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28358/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The database to identify uninsured drivers is known as the Motor Third Party Liability (MTPL) Project.

My Department issued a letter of intent to Insurance Ireland for amending of Road Traffic Act legislation to support the project in 2018 as part of the forthcoming Road Traffic (Miscellaneous Provisions Bill). This Bill has been referred to Cabinet Committee for further consideration. Ongoing meetings of the database project board are being held to oversee the project's implementation. The Motor Insurers' Bureau of Ireland (MIBI) state that the current project focus is on privately insured vehicles, which represent 92% of insured vehicles. Fleet policies, which present many challenges as insurers do not currently successfully capture all of the required detailed data regarding vehicles and drivers in a timely way, will be addressed in a later project phase.

The key reasons for the lengthening of the timetable for delivery of the MTPL database are:

- Delivery has now been significantly expanded to cover details on all Private, Commercial and Fleet motor vehicle information

- Delivery of the capability to capture and validate driver number details will require both an initial industry-wide start date for the collection of data for new policies and an extended period to allow for driver number details to be collected on normal renewals.

- Before insurance companies can start requiring customers to supply both their driver number details and those of their named drivers on the policy, amendments to the Road Traffic Acts will need to be in place.

- Mechanisms will have to be developed and agreed between all insurers and DTTAS Shannon for them to gain access to the NVDF to validate driver numbers.

Insurance Ireland and all the insurance companies operating in Ireland, working together with DTTAS, An Garda Síochána, and the MIBI, through the MTPL Insurance Database Project Board, have now structured the delivery of Phase 2 of the MTPL project into four sub-phases, namely:

### **Public Transport Data**

313. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the purchases at Luas ticket machines by payment type, that is, card and cash, in each of the years 2016 to 2018 and to date 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28362/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The issue raised is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the Luas operator Transdev and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to TII for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Sports Capital Programme Applications**

314. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of an application for the sports capital grant by a group (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28370/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** The 2018 round of the Sports Capital Programme closed for applications on Friday 19th October last. By that deadline, a record 2,337 applications were submitted seeking a total of €162m in funding.

186 of these applications were for projects that were deemed invalid under the 2017 round of the programme that subsequently submitted corrected documents. These applications were assessed first and approximately €7m in allocations to 170 projects were announced on the 17th January.

619 equipment only applications were assessed next and 466 allocations with a value of €9.8m were announced in May.

Work is now underway in assessing the remaining applications for capital works, including an application from the organisation referred to by the Deputy.

For the first time applicants who submitted incorrect documentation under this round are being given the opportunity to correct their application during the assessment period. While there will be no undue delay in completing the assessment process, in view of the opportunity to correct documentation, the record number of applications received and the detailed information contained in each application, it is likely to take a number of months to have all applications assessed. Accordingly, I expect that it will be towards the end of the third quarter of this year before the full set of allocations under this current round of the programme are announced.

### **Irish Aviation Authority**

315. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of domestically owned private jets registered here. [28375/19]

316. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of domestically or commercially owned private helicopters registered here. [28376/19]

317. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of private jet and plane journeys that departed from here in 2018 or the latest year for which data is available. [28377/19]

318. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of privately owned helicopter journeys that took place here in 2018 or the latest year for which data is available. [28378/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take

Questions Nos. 315 to 318, inclusive, together.

Details about the registration and use of private aircraft is a matter, in the first instance, for the State's aviation regulator the Irish Aviation Authority, who I have asked to respond directly on the matters raised. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

### Public Transport Expenditure

319. **Deputy Imelda Munster** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the capital allocation provided to Iarnród Éireann, Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus in each of the years 2016 to 2019. [28396/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As the Deputy is aware capital funding is primarily provided by my Department to Iarnród Éireann, Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus through the National Transport Authority (NTA).

In addition to that NTA administered funding programme, funding is also provided directly to Iarnród Éireann by my Department under the Infrastructure Manager Multi-Annual Contract (or IMMAC), which provides the funding framework for the maintenance and renewal of our railway infrastructure and is a statutory contractual agreement between the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and Iarnród Éireann.

The annual Exchequer contributions to the IMMAC from 2016 to 2019 are provided in the following table:

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Exchequer contribution to IMMAC	€134m	€158.8m	€160m	€197m

With regard to the funding programmes managed by the NTA, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please inform my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 days.

### Rail Services Provision

320. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if increased train services will be considered for commuters in Portarlinton, County Laois; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28419/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The issue raised is an operational matter for Iarnród Éireann and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within 10 working days.

### Tourism Promotion

321. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way in which Fáilte Ireland promotes Grianán of Ailleach as a must see along the Wild Atlantic Way; and the future plans of Fáilte Ireland to develop it as a tourist attraction. [28433/19]



**Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Brendan Griffin):** My Department's role in relation to tourism lies primarily in the area of national tourism policy. While my Department provides funding to Fáilte Ireland for investment in tourism promotion and development, it is not directly involved in individual tourism projects or programmes such as the Wild Atlantic Way.

With specific regard to the Grianán of Áileach, further to a similar question from the Deputy last month, I understand that Fáilte Ireland wrote to the Deputy with information on its promotion of the site and further plans to maximise its potential. In light of the Deputy's follow-up queries, I have asked Fáilte Ireland to contact the Deputy in regard to the further detail sought. Please contact my private office if you have not been contacted within ten working days.

### Road Projects

322. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the initial feasibility assessment of possible routes for a potential N3 to N4 link road project; if a copy will be provided when it is complete; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28436/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. Under the Roads Acts 1993-2015, the planning, design, construction and management of individual national roads is a matter for Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. I understand that the feasibility report referred to by the Deputy was commissioned by TII following discussions with the National Transport Authority (NTA) in the context of considering the overall resilience of the M50.

Noting the above position, I have referred the question to TII for a direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

### Road Safety

323. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of the RSA study on the road safety of e-scooters; the timeframe for the publication of the study; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28439/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Road Safety Authority's review of current practice and safety implications of electric personal mobility devices was submitted to me in late June.

The publication of the report is a matter for the Road Safety Authority, in consultation with my Department, once I have made a decision on the way forward in relation to electric scooters. Until then, the report forms part of the deliberative process and will not be published until this has concluded.

### Air Services Provision

324. **Deputy Noel Rock** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason his Department awarded a fifth freedom permit to an airline (details supplied) to operate a service

between Dublin and Madrid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28454/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Ireland - Ethiopia Bilateral Air Services Agreement, signed in 2014, allows for the granting of fifth freedom air traffic rights for airlines of both countries, on a reciprocal basis and subject to the approval of the relevant aeronautical authorities.

Ethiopian Airlines applied to both the Spanish and Irish aeronautical authorities in 2018 for approval of their Addis Ababa - Madrid - Dublin (return) route. Following confirmation of approval by the Spanish Aeronautical Authorities and having consulted with Irish air carriers, the Department authorised the route as it conformed with the rights provided under the Air Services Agreement.

Ireland traditionally has a liberal aviation policy and remains positively disposed towards the development of competitive air services. In that context, my Department will continue to consider applications for fifth freedom air traffic rights under bilateral air services agreements, on a case-by-case basis.

### Vehicle Testing

325. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to provide a vehicle testing centre for Listowel, County Kerry to serve the town and its environs in view of the fact that persons in the area currently must travel long distances; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28463/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Under the Road Safety Authority Act 2006 (Conferral of Functions) Order 2006 (S.I. No. 477 of 2006), the Road Safety Authority (RSA) has responsibility for the operation, oversight, development and delivery of vehicle roadworthiness testing arrangements.

I have therefore forwarded this Question to the RSA for direct reply to the Deputy. I would ask the Deputy to contact my office if a response has not been received within ten days.

### Noise Pollution

326. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the noise data collected by the Dublin Airport Authority in the process of preparing for the second runway; the noise data collected on a regular basis; and the locations the noise data was collected in these instances. [28468/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I am informed that the daa publishes detailed information on noise data collected and the locations at which the data was collected on their website. The information can be found at: <https://www.dublinairport.com/about-us/-community-affairs/airport-noise-noise-reports>

### Noise Pollution

327. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the noise data which will be transferred to Fingal County Council as the newly appointed noise regulator; and if copies of this data can be made available. [28469/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** Under Section 9 of the Aircraft Noise (Dublin Airport) Regulation Act 2019 it is a matter for Fingal County Council, as the Noise Regulator, to determine the information it requires.

That section also provides that the Noise Regulator shall publish on its website a report which will include a summary of the data examined and the relevant technical information in relation to any proposed noise mitigation measures and operating restrictions to be introduced. It will also include a non-technical summary. In addition, it will publish, in a national newspaper, a notice stating how persons may view or otherwise have access to that report.

The Act provides for similar powers and responsibilities under Sections 10 and 12 of the Act with reference to An Bord Pleanála, in the case of an appeal, and again to the Noise Regulator under Section 11 in the case of a planning application.

The Act provides an open and transparent process for assessing noise at Dublin airport and provides that all relevant data is publically available and accessible.

### **Cycling Facilities Provision**

328. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the policies in place in relation to the way in which the division of cycle facility design work between the NTA, local authorities and consultancy companies is planned; and if and the way in which these policies ensure that local authorities develop and maintain the capacity to evaluate cycle facility design proposals contained in planning applications they receive. [28471/19]

334. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the rationale for the establishment of a cycling design office in the National Transport Authority; if the design of cycle facilities is proposed to be carried out by the NTA and its consultants or by local authorities and their consultants, or by a combination of the two; and if the former, the way in which the work is to be divided. [28477/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 328 and 334 together.

As the Deputy is aware the National Transport Authority (NTA) has certain statutory functions in relation to cycling facilities and the promotion of cycling and it exercises these functions in close co-operation with local authorities.

The Deputy will I am sure acknowledge the good work already undertaken through the development and publication by the NTA of the *National Cycle Manual* and the publication of the *Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets* as jointly developed by my Department and the then Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. These are both important manuals in guiding officials within local authorities in relation to our urban built environment and the promotion of best practice in the provision of active travel infrastructure.

As stated within the *Climate Action Plan 2019*, the NTA is now establishing a dedicated office to assist with the timely provision of improved cycling infrastructure arising from the significantly improved funding now being made available. The structure and management of the office is a matter for the NTA. I understand the initial focus of the work will be within the five major urban centres of Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford and development of their strategic cycling networks; also, a full programme of work will be developed this year which will address the specific issues raised by the Deputy.

Noting the NTA's responsibility in the matter, I have referred your question to the NTA for a more detailed reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

*Questions Nos. 329 to 333, inclusive, answered with Question No. 310.*

*Question No. 334 answered with Question No. 328.*

### **Public Transport Data**

335. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of new Leap cards issued in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form. [28501/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. The National Transport Authority (NTA) has responsibility for integrated transport ticketing (including the Leap card) and also for the collection and publication of statistics relating to public transport generally.

Therefore, I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a response within ten working days.

### **Penalty Points System Data**

336. **Deputy Marc MacSharry** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the number of penalty point notices issued in 2017, 2018 and to date in 2019, in tabular form. [28502/19]

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** The Road Safety Authority publishes statistics of penalty points issued on its website.

You can access this data at the following link ; <http://www.rsa.ie/en/RSA/Road-Safety/RSA-Statistics/Penalty-Points-Issued/2019-Penalty-Points-Stats/>

### **Adoption Data**

337. **Deputy Carol Nolan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of domestic adoptions applied for and successfully concluded in each of the years 2011 to 2018 and to date in 2019; if she will consider conducting a review of the Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017 to investigate if deficiencies or obstacles to domestic adoption can be identified; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28363/19]

**Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Katherine Zappone):** The Adoption Authority of Ireland is responsible for considering applications for domestic adoption orders, under the Adoption Act 2010 and the Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017. Information on the numbers of adoption orders applied for and granted by the Authority are contained in the Annual Reports of the Authority, which are available to the public on their website.

In 2011, the Authority received 47 applications for domestic adoptions, and granted 39 adoption orders.

In 2012, the Authority received 92 applications for domestic adoptions, and granted 49 adoption orders.

In 2013, the Authority received 98 applications for domestic adoptions, and granted 116 adoption orders.

In 2014, the Authority received 102 applications for domestic adoptions, and granted 112 adoption orders.

In 2015, the Authority received 93 applications for domestic adoptions, and granted 94 adoption orders.

In 2016, the Authority received 96 applications for domestic adoptions, and granted 95 adoption orders.

In 2017, the Authority received 96 applications for domestic adoptions, and granted 72 adoption orders.

In 2018, the Authority received 102 applications for domestic adoptions, and granted 72 adoption orders.

To date in 2019, the Authority has received 66 applications for domestic adoptions, and granted 34 adoption orders.

It should be noted that the numbers of applications and the number of adoption orders granted are not equal in any given year. It may be the case that an adoption order is applied for in one year and granted in the next.

Regarding the operation of the Adoption (Amendment) Act 2017, both the Adoption Authority of Ireland and my Department continue to monitor its effectiveness. Significant provisions of the Act include those relating to step-parent adoption, and those relating to the adoption of children from foster care, where this is in their best interests. These provisions are being kept under continuous review, including with Tusla, as required.

### **Departmental Schemes**

338. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when decisions will be made and applicants notified in relation to a scheme (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28466/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** Almost 500 applications were received by my Department under the scheme referred to by the Deputy.

This reflects a huge level of interest in the scheme, which includes a number of different funding measures.

My officials are currently assessing all of the applications received and decisions on the applications will be made when the assessment process is completed.

### **Departmental Schemes**

339. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Minister for Rural and Community Development when decisions will be made and applicants notified in relation to a scheme (details supplied);



and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28467/19]

**Minister for Rural and Community Development (Deputy Michael Ring):** Almost 500 applications were received by my Department under the scheme referred to by the Deputy.

This reflects a huge interest in the scheme, which includes a number of different funding measures.

My officials are currently assessing all of the applications received and decisions on the applications will be made when the assessment process is completed.

### **Free Travel Scheme Eligibility**

340. **Deputy Jackie Cahill** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a proposal will be brought forward to ensure persons refused a driver licence due to sight impairment are granted a travel pass; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28525/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The free travel scheme provides free travel on the main public and private transport services for those eligible under the scheme. These include road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann, as well as Luas and services provided by over 80 private transport operators. There are currently approx. 948,000 customers with direct eligibility. Following recent announcements in Budget 2019, the funding for the free travel scheme was increased by €5 million to a total of €95 million.

In general, access to a free travel pass for those aged under 66 is linked to a person being in receipt of certain primary Social Protection payments such as disability allowance, invalidity pension, carer's allowance, blind pension and partial capacity benefit. In 1997 the free travel pass was extended to all registered blind people regardless of whether they qualify for the Department's blind person's pension or any other Social Protection payment. Blind people remain one of the only cohorts of people aged under 66 who can qualify for a free travel pass while not in receipt of a qualifying Social Protection payment.

Any possible extension to the eligibility criteria for free travel would have significant costs implications for the free travel scheme and would also require additional administrative processes to be put in place to adjudicate eligibility. Any decision to do so could only be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme (SWA), the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection may award a travel supplement in any case where the circumstances of the case so warrant. The supplement is intended to assist with ongoing or recurring travel costs that cannot be met from the client's own resources and are deemed to be necessary. Every decision is based on consideration of the circumstances of the case, taking account of the nature and extent of the need and of the resources of the person concerned.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Carer's Allowance Data**

341. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the number of persons receiving a carer's allowance by age profile in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28569/19]

3 July 2019

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The information requested by the Deputy is detailed in the following tabular statement.

Recipients of Carer's Allowance by Age at 30th June 2019

Age of Recipient	Recipients
18	7
19	44
20	100
21	132
22	169
23	229
24	242
25	337
26	425
27	511
28	630
29	696
30	852
31	931
32	1,090
33	1,182
34	1,328
35	1,458
36	1,507
37	1,689
38	1,811
39	1,940
40	2,043
41	1,935
42	1,919
43	1,936
44	2,134
45	2,224
46	2,277
47	2,297
48	2,273
49	2,299
50	2,169
51	2,153
52	2,125
53	2,157
54	2,025
55	2,053
56	1,878
57	1,719

Questions - Written Answers

Age of Recipient	Recipients
58	1,654
59	1,627
60	1,527
61	1,476
62	1,410
63	1,334
64	1,332
65	1,295
66	1,307
67	1,181
68	1,219
69	1,141
70	1,203
71	1,083
72	1,094
73	972
74	847
75	827
76	699
77	632
78	544
79	515
80	448
81	360
82	295
83	265
84	196
85	155
86	115
87	87
88	59
89	35
90	32
91	20
92	16
93	2
94	3
95	6
99	2

**JobPath Programme**

342. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a decision to refer a person (details supplied) to the JobPath scheme will be reviewed in view of the fact they have recently completed higher level education with distinction

and now wish to pursue further high level education in order to secure employment in their chosen industry; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28303/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** As the Deputy will be aware, the primary goal of the Department's activation services is to move people from long-term unemployment to full-time and sustained employment.

My Department refers long-term job seeking customers to the JobPath service to receive one-to-one intensive and regular engagement with a personal adviser who will assess their skills, experience, challenges and work goals and agree a "personal progression plan" that includes a schedule of activities, including relevant training and educational programmes to assist them in finding full-time sustainable employment. There are no barriers to any participants pursuing training, including further education and training courses, providing they are relevant to the agreed personal progression plan

All persons in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance must be capable of, available for and actively seeking full time employment. The Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act 2005, as amended, specifies that participation in activation meetings is mandatory

In regard to the individual case raised by the Deputy, this person has already availed of the Department's Back to Education Allowance scheme while completing a third level course. Any client engaged with the JobPath service who wishes to make a further application for support under this scheme is entitled to do so. If their application is approved and awarded, they then will be released from the JobPath service.

Until such time as an application for the Back to Education Allowance scheme is made the individual must engage and actively participate with the JobPath service.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

343. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the status of a disability allowance application by a person (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28310/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** I confirm that my Department received an application for disability allowance (DA) from this lady on 24 May 2019. On completion of the necessary investigations on all aspects of the claim a decision will be made and the person concerned will be notified directly of the outcome.

The processing time for individual DA claims may vary in accordance with their relative complexity in terms of the three main qualifying criteria, the person's circumstances and the information they provide in support of their claim.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Free Travel Scheme**

344. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the estimated full year cost of extending the free travel pass to those categorised as unable

to drive a vehicle on medical grounds or due to the fact they do not meet regulations set out by the Road Safety Authority; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28315/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The free travel scheme provides free travel on the main public and private transport services for those eligible under the scheme. These include road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann, as well as Luas and services provided by over 80 private transport operators. There are currently approx. 948,000 customers with direct eligibility. Following recent announcements in Budget 2019, the funding for the free travel scheme was increased by €5 million to a total of €95 million.

In general, access to a free travel pass for those aged under 66 is linked to a person being in receipt of certain primary Social Protection payments such as disability allowance, invalidity pension, carer's allowance, blind pension and partial capacity benefit. In 1997 the free travel pass was extended to all registered blind people regardless of whether they qualify for the Department's blind person's pension or any other Social Protection payment. Blind people remain one of the only cohorts of people aged under 66 who can qualify for a free travel pass while not in receipt of a qualifying Social Protection payment.

Any possible extension to the eligibility criteria for free travel would have significant costs implications for the free travel scheme and would also require additional administrative processes to be put in place to adjudicate eligibility. Any decision to do so could only be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

Under the supplementary welfare allowance scheme (SWA), the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection may award a travel supplement in any case where the circumstances of the case so warrant. The supplement is intended to assist with ongoing or recurring travel costs that cannot be met from the client's own resources and are deemed to be necessary. Every decision is based on consideration of the circumstances of the case, taking account of the nature and extent of the need and of the resources of the person concerned.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Consultancy Contracts Expenditure**

345. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the amount spent on external consultancy reports between May 2016 and to date in 2019; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28316/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection engages consultants (individuals or organisations) to provide expert analysis over a wide range of areas, which includes the delivery of reports, studies, assessments, recommendations and proposals that contribute to decision making or policy making. I am advised by my Department that the amount spent on external consultancy reports between May 2016 and to date in 2019 was €1,792,127 for 32 reports.

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

346. **Deputy Eugene Murphy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection when an application for a disability allowance by a person (details supplied) will be decided. [28323/19]



**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The person concerned submitted an application for disability allowance (DA) on 5 April 2019. Their application, based upon all the evidence submitted, was refused on medical grounds as it was not found that this gentleman was substantially restricted in taking up employment.

The person concerned was notified in writing of this decision on 27 June 2019 and was also notified of their right to request a review of this decision or to appeal it to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office (SWAO).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the deputy.

### **Flexible Work Practices**

347. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if there has been an investigation into the feasibility of introducing a four day work week on the grounds of improving employee well-being and reducing workplace stress as desired by 57% of office workers in a survey (details supplied). [28405/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** In March this year, the Government launched Future Jobs Ireland, a framework of focused ambitions which will form a key part of Ireland's future economic agenda over the medium term. Primary responsibility for the programme rests with my colleague, the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Heather Humphreys T.D.

Future Jobs Ireland addresses challenges to participation in the labour force by developing and implementing a range of new initiatives aimed at easing barriers to entry into the workforce including investment in Early Learning and Care, providing tailored activation and training supports and generating attractive employment opportunities including intelligent working arrangements.

As the nature of work and society changes, the way we organise work must also. One of the ambitions in Future Jobs Ireland 2019 is to foster participation in the labour market through flexible working solutions. Flexible working solutions, including part-time, remote working, compressed hours, home-working and job sharing, are understood to have the potential to improve labour market participation, particularly amongst women with young children, as well as those with caring responsibilities, older people, and people with disabilities. Flexible working can also provide solutions for those who would otherwise take unpaid parental leave but cannot afford to do so.

Flexible work can assist in the development of an inclusive society by offering options to the benefit of employers, workers and wider society. We already have many companies in Ireland who offer remote working to their employees and this trend is expected to increase in the future. For workers, flexible work solutions such as remote working can mean substantial savings in terms of rents and property costs while also reducing the need to commute, leading to a better work-life balance. For businesses, intelligent working arrangements can support staff retention, a more motivated workforce with fewer sick days, and greater productivity, as well as the opportunity to draw workers from a larger pool of talent.

Under Future Jobs Ireland 2019, the Department of Justice and Equality will develop guidance to support employers in offering more family-friendly working options and promoting the adoption of flexible and or remote working solutions and structures for parents. In addition to this, the Department of Justice and Equality will commence a national consultation on the

extension of flexible working options to all employees. The findings of the research and the outcome of the national consultation may lead to the development of further, new deliverables for inclusion in the next stage, Future Jobs Ireland 2020.

I hope this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Disability Allowance Applications**

348. **Deputy John McGuinness** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a disability allowance will be approved for a person (details supplied). [28449/19]

**Minister of State at the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Finian McGrath):** The person concerned has been awarded disability allowance with effect from 20 February 2019. The first payment was made by her chosen payment method on 26 June 2019.

Arrears of payment due will issue as soon as possible once any necessary adjustment is calculated and applied in respect of any overlapping payments (if applicable).

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Healthcare Infrastructure Provision**

349. **Deputy Joan Collins** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if the main contractor (details supplied) fully complied with the community nursing unit contract in relation to the €18 million community nursing unit on Tymon North Road, Tallaght, Dublin 24; and if she will provide the supporting evidence to ensure that the main contractor and its sub-contractors are fully compliant with all employment law as required by the contract at each interim payment made during the contract. [28452/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** Responsibility for the enforcement of contract clauses is a matter for the contracting body, which in this case I understand is the HSE, which comes within the remit of my colleague, Simon Harris, T.D., Minister for Health.

### **Disability Allowance Appeals**

350. **Deputy Robert Troy** asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection if a disability allowance appeal by a person (details supplied) will be expedited. [28524/19]

**Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection (Deputy Regina Doherty):** I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all of the available evidence including that adduced at the oral hearing, decided to allow the appeal of the person concerned. The person concerned was notified of the Appeals Officer's decision on 9 April 2019.

The implementation of the Appeals Officer's decision is a matter for the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. The Department has advised the Social Welfare Appeals Office that the disability allowance claim concerned is now being put into payment.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Employment

Affairs and Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions in relation to social welfare entitlements.

I trust this clarifies the matter for the Deputy.

### **Planning Data**

351. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the strategic housing developments before An Bord Pleanála in north County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28311/19]

358. **Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of strategic housing developments submitted to An Bord Pleanála; the number of units in each of the applications; the number granted planning permission; the length of time it took for permission to be granted; the number of commencement notices that have been issued for those that were granted permission; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28384/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 351 and 358 together.

The Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 provides for new temporary streamlined arrangements to enable planning applications for strategic housing developments (SHD), of 100 housing units or more or student accommodation or shared accommodation developments of 200 bed spaces or more, to be made directly to An Bord Pleanála for determination.

In the period from the new arrangements coming into operation in July 2017 up until 30 May 2019, the Board has received 195 valid pre-application consultation requests in respect of which 162 opinions have already issued. Further to this process, the Board has subsequently received 93 planning applications and has issued decisions in respect of 62 cases to date, all of which were made within the prescribed 16-week decision timeframe.

There have been 11 SHD applications made in respect of developments in Kildare, all of which have been decided. Under section 30 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), I am specifically precluded from exercising any power or control in relation to any case with which a planning authority or the Board is or may be involved.

The 2017 SHD Regulations provide for the publication of a weekly list of applications received and applications determined or otherwise disposed of by the Board in relation to SHD cases. These weekly lists are available to view on the Board's website at <http://www.pleanala.ie/>.

Arrangements have been put in place by all bodies under the aegis of my Department to facilitate the provision of information directly to members of the Oireachtas. This provides a speedy, efficient and cost effective system to address queries directly. The contact email address for An Bord Pleanála is [Oireachtasqueries@pleanala.ie](mailto:Oireachtasqueries@pleanala.ie).

### **Planning Issues**

352. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the consideration that is given and-or evaluation made when planning permission is

granted for strategic housing developments on the impact of high density developments in relation to local services such as schools, medical services and road infrastructure; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28312/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Act 2016 provides for new temporary streamlined arrangements to enable planning applications for strategic housing developments (SHD), of 100 housing units or more or student accommodation or shared accommodation developments of 200 bed spaces or more, to be made directly to An Bord Pleanála for determination.

In making a decision on an application for permission in respect of an SHD proposal, the Board has regard to a number of matters including the report of the relevant planning authority on the proposed development, the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, the development plan, including any relevant local area plan, local infrastructure and services, any submissions or observations received, as well as any relevant Ministerial or Government policies, including any guidelines issued by my Department.

A detailed and national level policy approach in relation to residential densities in urban areas is set out in my Department's 2009 Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas, issued under section 28 of the Act. The objective of these Guidelines is to ensure planning authorities bring about high quality and sustainable urban development by balancing the need to ensure the highest standards of residential design which encompasses building lay-out, design and heights and the need to ensure the efficient use of scarce land and infrastructural resources and the avoidance of urban sprawl.

Planning authorities, and, where applicable, the Board, must have regard to guidelines issued under section 28 in the performance of their functions generally under the Planning Acts.

### **National Planning Framework**

353. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if private developers are being encouraged to build higher density developments in view of the fact that such developments are in contrast with local area plans. [28313/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Under Project Ireland 2040, including the National Planning Framework (NPF), the Government has identified the achievement of compact growth as a key mechanism to support the future sustainable development of our cities and towns, addressing issues such as regional development, urban sprawl, long-distance commuting, housing supply and climate action.

The compact growth objectives set out in the NPF and the emerging Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies are wholly in accordance with and underpinned by statutory planning guidelines on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas, published by my Department in 2009 under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

The guidelines generally require net housing densities in the range of 35-50 dwellings per hectare (dph) in urban areas and over 50 dph in more central urban areas or on sites served by high frequency public transport. Many examples of the successful achievement of these density levels are set out in an accompanying Urban Design Manual.

In addition, it is important to note that the guidelines also provide scope for densities under 35 dph in smaller towns and villages, to assist in delivering sustainable urban housing

alternatives to one-off rural houses. Both the guidelines and the manual are available on my Department's website at the following link: [www.housing.gov.ie/planning/guidelines/planning-guidance](http://www.housing.gov.ie/planning/guidelines/planning-guidance).

In relation to the preparation of their Local Area Plans (LAPs), planning authorities are required to have regard to these guidelines and broader Government policy. It is also necessary for the content of LAPs within the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) to be consistent with the transport strategy for the GDA.

In relation to the assessment of planning applications and/or appeals on planning decisions, local planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála must have regard to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, the development plan, including any relevant local area plan, any submissions or observations received and relevant Ministerial guidelines or Government policies.

I am satisfied that the compact urban growth objectives of the National Planning Framework are consistent with and supported by the Guidelines for Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas and that these policy and guidance documents provide a robust framework for decision making on planning applications in a variety of different contexts.

My Department will continue to engage with planning authorities, the home-building industry and other sectoral interests to address any issues arising, particularly in the context of the review of development plans and related guidance, that will follow the making of the three Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies by the Regional Assemblies as part of the implementation of the National Planning Framework throughout the planning system.

### **Local Authority Staff Recruitment**

354. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government further to Parliamentary Question No. 913 of 10 July 2018, the outcome of the review by the Local Government Management Agency of the common recruitment pool; and the actions he has taken on foot of the review. [28328/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The Local Government Management Agency is currently engaged with FORSA trade union relating to changes to current recruitment procedures for clerical/administrative grades, including in respect of the "Common Recruitment Pool". Engagement is taking place under the auspices of the Workplace Relations Commission with a view to bringing the matter to a conclusion as quickly as possible.

### **Social and Affordable Housing Eligibility**

355. **Deputy Timmy Dooley** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if an income guidelines review for social housing is underway; if so, when an outcome is likely; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28331/19]

365. **Deputy Aindrias Moynihan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government when the reviews of income limits for social housing by local authorities will be completed; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28509/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 355 and 365 together.



Applications for social housing support are assessed by the relevant local authority, in accordance with the eligibility and need criteria set down in section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 and the associated Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, as amended.

The 2011 Regulations prescribe maximum net income limits for each local authority, in different bands according to the area concerned, with income being defined and assessed according to a standard Household Means Policy.

Under the Household Means Policy, which applies in all local authorities, net income for social housing assessment is defined as gross household income less income tax, PRSI and the universal social charge. The Policy provides for a range of income disregards, and local authorities also have discretion to decide to disregard income that is temporary, short-term or once off in nature.

The income bands and the authority area assigned to each band were based on an assessment of the income needed to provide for a household's basic needs, plus a comparative analysis of the local rental cost of housing accommodation across the country. It is important to note that the limits introduced at that time also reflected a blanket increase of €5,000 introduced prior to the new system coming into operation, in order to broaden the base from which social housing tenants are drawn, both promoting sustainable communities and also providing a degree of future-proofing.

Given the cost to the State of providing social housing, it is considered prudent and fair to direct resources to those most in need of social housing support. The current income eligibility requirements generally achieve this, providing for a fair and equitable system of identifying those households facing the greatest challenge in meeting their accommodation needs from their own resources.

However, as part of the broader social housing reform agenda, a review of income eligibility for social housing supports in each local authority area is under way. The review will also have regard to current initiatives being brought forward in terms of affordability and cost rental and will be completed when the impacts of these parallel initiatives have been considered.

### **Homelessness Strategy**

356. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government his views on a report commissioned by Dublin City Council and carried out by persons (details supplied) which show the negative impacts of homelessness on children; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28341/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I understand that the report referred to by the Deputy refers to the experiences of homeless families in hotels.

The Government is committed to minimising the use of hotels as emergency accommodation. In this regard, my Department is working with the local authorities to support the introduction of family hubs. Family hubs provide more appropriate emergency accommodation for families, with better facilities for cooking, laundry and recreation. There are currently 27 family Hubs in operation with capacity to cater for approximately 660 families. Further hubs will be developed over the course of the rest of 2019.

The Government has also increased the funding available to local authorities to deliver

homeless services to €146m in 2019, an increase of over 25% on the 2018 budget allocation. Families experiencing homelessness are supported by the local authorities and their service delivery partners to identify and secure an independent tenancy. In 2018, 5,135 adults exited homelessness into an independent tenancy. The Government is committed to securing housing solutions for all of the households currently experiencing homelessness.

### **Housing Issues**

357. **Deputy Jack Chambers** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the status of the working group established to examine the judgment of the European Court of Justice regarding the construction of one-off houses also known as the Flemish Decree; the names of those in the working group; when the group will report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28383/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** Following engagement between the European Commission and my Department regarding the European Court of Justice ruling in the “Flemish Decree” case, a working group was established to review and, where necessary, recommend changes to the 2005 Planning Guidelines on Sustainable Rural Housing, issued under section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended. The working group comprises senior officials from the Planning Division of my Department and senior officials from the Planning Divisions of local authorities, nominated by the local government sector.

Taking account of the engagement with the European Commission regarding revisions to the 2005 Rural Housing Guidelines and subject to the completion of the ongoing deliberations by the working group, I will be in a position to finalise and issue to planning authorities revisions to the 2005 Guidelines that take account of the relevant European Court of Justice judgment.

*Question No. 358 answered with Question No. 351.*

### **Local Authority Housing Data**

359. **Deputy Tony McLoughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of vacant council houses in counties Mayo and Sligo; the areas in which these vacant council houses are located; the length of time each house has been vacant for; the number of these vacant council dwellings that are under repair, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28398/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The number of vacant local authority houses is one of a number of issues reported on by the National Oversight & Audit Commission (NOAC) every year. NOAC’s activities in this regard are summarised in its Annual Performance Indicator Reports for the years 2014-2017; the most recent data on a local authority basis, including Mayo and Sligo County Council, are set out in their 2017 report, which is available on the NOAC website at the following link: <http://noac.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/NOAC-Performance-Indicators-Report-2017.pdf>. The previous annual reports are also available on the NOAC website.

While Mayo and Sligo County Councils are responsible for the management and maintenance of their own housing stock, it should be noted that the number of vacant properties is not static. As would be expected in the management of several thousand properties, the position in relation to vacancies changes regularly, as tenants move in and out.

My Department is continuing to engage with local authorities, to support them in returning both short and longer-term vacant properties to use as swiftly as possible, including through the Voids funding programme. Elected Councils also have a role to play in supporting this work by making adequate budgetary provision for housing repairs and maintenance, utilising the housing rental income available to them.

### **Derelict Sites**

360. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the derelict housing register by county over the past five years by commercial and residential properties. [28420/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** The information requested by the Deputy is not collected by my Department.

Under section 8 of the Derelict Sites Act 1990, each planning authority is required to maintain a register of derelict sites, including derelict houses and structures, in their respective functional areas and to have it available for inspection at its offices during office hours. In addition, some planning authorities publish their register online, although this is not required by statute.

### **Housing Data**

361. **Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the details of void houses by county over the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28427/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I assume the Deputy is referring to vacant local authority houses, which the National Oversight & Audit Commission (NOAC) reports on annually. In relation to the Deputy's query, the details sought are reflected in NOAC's Annual Performance Indicator Reports for the years 2014-2017. The most recent data is set out in the 2017 report, which is available on the NOAC website at the following link: <http://noac.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/NOAC-Performance-Indicators-Report-2017.pdf>. The previous annual reports are also available on the NOAC website.

While local authorities are responsible for the management and maintenance of their own housing stock, it should be noted that the number of vacant properties is not static. As would be expected in the management of around 130,000 social homes, the position in relation to vacancies changes regularly, tenants move in and out.

My Department is continuing to engage with local authorities, to support them in returning both short and longer-term vacant properties to use as swiftly as possible, including through the Voids funding programme. Elected Councils also have a role to play in supporting this work by making adequate budgetary provision for housing repairs and maintenance, utilising the housing rental income available to them.

### **Repair and Leasing Scheme**

362. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government if there is a grant scheme in place to assist homeowners wishing to renovate and repair rural and rundown dwellings; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28441/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):**

The Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) has been developed under Pillar 5 of the Government's Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness to assist private property owners and local authorities or Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) to harness the accommodation potential that exists in vacant properties. The scheme is targeted at owners of vacant properties who cannot afford or access the funding needed to bring their properties up to the required standard for rental purposes. Subject to the suitability of the property for social housing, and the agreement of the property owner, the cost of the necessary repairs will be met upfront by the relevant local authority or an Approved Housing Body (AHB). As part of the agreement, the property owner then leases the dwelling to the local authority for use as social housing for a length that is linked to the value of the repairs but subject to a minimum of 5 years. RLS is not a grant scheme; the value of the repairs is offset incrementally against the agreed rental payment over a defined period within the lease. The RLS is available in all local authority areas. However, it is a condition of the scheme that the property is in an area with a social housing need and fulfils social housing demand.

Property owners may also qualify for schemes such as the Better Energy Homes Scheme. The Better Energy Homes Scheme is administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland (SEAI) to help homeowners and landlords reduce their energy costs and emissions by providing grants towards insulation, heating control and solar thermal improvements on homes occupied and built before 2006. Further details on grant payments and qualifying works are available from the SEAI website at [www.seai.ie](http://www.seai.ie). There is also an annual grants scheme for the conservation and repair of traditional farm buildings and related structures for farmers in the Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS). Information is available on the Heritage Ireland website at [www.heritagecouncil.ie/projects/traditional-farm-buildings-grant-scheme](http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/projects/traditional-farm-buildings-grant-scheme)

**Home Loan Scheme**

363. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of Rebuilding Ireland home loan applications received to date by county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28486/19]

364. **Deputy John Brady** asked the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government the number of Rebuilding Ireland home loans granted by each county; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [28487/19]

**Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government (Deputy Eoghan Murphy):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 363 and 364 together.

My Department does not collect information on the number of Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan (RIHL) applications received by Local Authorities. However, the Housing Agency provides a central support service, which assesses RIHL applications on behalf of local authorities and makes recommendations to the authorities to approve or refuse applications. I have asked the Agency to compile figures on the numbers of applications that it has assessed since the scheme began. The most recent figures, as at the end of May 2019, indicate that 4,193 applications have been assessed by it since the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan scheme launched in February 2018, details of which are broken down by local authority in the following table.

Local Authority	Applications Assessed
Carlow County Council	55
Cavan County Council	14

Local Authority	Applications Assessed
Clare County Council	66
Cork City Council	157
Cork County Council	328
Donegal County Council	38
Dublin City Council	464
Dún Laoghaire - Rathdown County Council	111
Fingal County Council	580
Galway City Council	91
Galway County Council	143
Kerry County Council	100
Kildare County Council	172
Kilkenny County Council	38
Laois County Council	93
Leitrim County Council	14
Limerick City & County Council	114
Longford County Council	44
Louth County Council	107
Mayo County Council	62
Meath County Council	242
Monaghan County Council	34
Offaly County Council	45
Roscommon County Council	44
Sligo County Council	47
South Dublin County Council	306
Tipperary County Council	115
Waterford City & County Council	69
Westmeath County Council	33
Wexford County Council	112
Wicklow County Council	169
Total	4193

In addition to this, my Department publishes information on the overall number and value of (i) local authority loan approvals and (ii) local authority loan drawdowns. Information up to the end of Quarter 1 2019, including in relation to number and value of mortgage drawdowns, is available on the Department's website at the following link: <http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/statistics/house-prices-loans-and-profile-borrowers/local-authority-loan-activity> .

*Question No. 365 answered with Question No. 355.*

### Wildlife Protection

366. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the actions she is taking to support the international efforts to cease elephant poaching; if she is requesting the adoption of a mandatory and comprehensive EU-wide ban on all external and domestic trading in ivory; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28428/19]



367. **Deputy Catherine Martin** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if she has considered banning a domestic ivory trade. [28429/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** I propose to take Questions Nos. 366 and 367 together.

My Department is responsible for the implementation of the Wildlife Act and the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations, which together provide the legislative framework for the implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in Ireland.

This UN Convention regulates trade in certain listed species, including elephants, between Parties. Ireland has been a Party to the Convention since 8th January 2002.

Ireland does not have significant trade in ivory specimens and the domestic market allows only for trade in pre-Convention ivory. This trade consists primarily of carved artifacts, antique items and some musical instrument components and is governed by CITES.

Applications for CITES certificates or permits are examined carefully by the Irish CITES Management Authority in my Department to determine that the ivory has an attested legal origin. If the Management Authority is satisfied that the ivory has been legally acquired, it will then issue a certificate or permit to verify that fact in line with current CITES regulations.

The EU and its Member States have been at the forefront in the regulation of ivory trade and stringent rules are already in place across the Union. While these have functioned effectively to date, the current EU ivory guidance document is in the process of being revised; it is envisaged that the guidance will incorporate stricter rules on trade in raw and worked ivory in the future.

As a Member State, Ireland participates in regular EU CITES Management Committee and CITES Scientific Group meetings and supports a common EU approach to CITES matters, including the ivory trade. The Irish authorities will continue to participate fully in discussions around this issue.

### **Hedge Cutting Season**

368. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht when the regulations contained within the Heritage Act 2018 will commence. [28393/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The provisions under Section 7 of the Heritage Act 2018 allow for the making of Regulations relating to burning and cutting hedgerows.

Section 7(1) of the Heritage Act 2018 provides that I as Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, may make Regulations to allow the burning of vegetation during such periods in the month of March and in such parts of the country as specified in the Regulations.

I made a decision last February not to make Regulations to extend the season for the burning of vegetation into March 2019. This decision was taken as there would have been no basis for me to do so given the fact that the relatively dry weather during the six month period when the burning of vegetation could have been undertaken under the law (September to February inclusive) would not have precluded landowners from burning vegetation. Therefore, the existing provisions in the Wildlife Acts on burning remained in force.

In relation to hedgerows, Section 7(2) of the Heritage Act 2018 provides for the cutting of roadside hedges only during the month of August under Regulations. Hedgerows are a very

important wildlife and biodiversity resources, providing food, shelter, corridors of movement, nesting and hibernation sites for many of our native flora and fauna. Ireland has some 300,000 kilometres of hedgerow mainly surrounding fields and properties across the country and only roadside hedges are subject to the provisions of the Heritage Act - a fraction of the entirety of the total hedgerow resource in this country. I will be making an announcement on this issue shortly.

### **Historic Structures Fund**

369. **Deputy Eamon Scanlon** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the financial support available to Sligo County Council in 2019-2020 for the conservation and protection of a location (details supplied) in County Sligo; if her Department provides funding for the commissioning of conservation reports; the estimated cost on the local authority of assessing such a structure as the location for the purpose of submitting an application to the structures at risk fund; the criteria used to assess the eligibility of a structure under the fund; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28456/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** My role, as Minister, with regard to the protection and management of our built heritage is set out in the provisions of relevant legislation, including the Planning Acts and the National Monuments Acts, as are the role of local authorities and the responsibilities of owners.

I understand that the structure in question is in the ownership of the local authority, which is, therefore, responsible for its upkeep and maintenance. They would be in the best position to advise on the estimated cost of any assessment or conservation report.

My Department provides financial support for the protection of heritage buildings and historic structures through the Historic Structures Fund (HSF), formerly the Structures at Risk Fund and the Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS), which are administered by local authorities. This year I have allocated €1.824m and €2.5m respectively to these schemes. Details of these projects and funding, and the criteria by which they are assessed, are available on my Department's website and local authority websites. Sligo County Council was allocated €30,000 under the HSF and €60,000 under the BHIS. While the closing dates for applications have now passed, my Department will remain in close contact with local authorities throughout the year to ensure the best possible use is made of all funds, including by reallocating funds where certain projects do not proceed within agreed timeframes.

In the context of a particular building or historic structure, the best advice is generally to contact the Heritage Officer or Architectural Conservation Officer in the local authority who is well placed to advise on the various types of funding available to assist with its renovation or conservation. The structure in question is also recorded on the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) for County Sligo and my Department's National Monuments Service would be happy to provide any archaeological advice or guidance that might be of assistance.

### **Departmental Funding**

370. **Deputy Willie Penrose** asked the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the estimated cost in a full year if the budget for an organisation (details supplied) increased by 12%; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [28607/19]

**Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Josepha Madigan):** The al-

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locations across my Department are published in the Revised Estimates Volume at *www.per.gov.ie*. My Department secured additional funding of over €36 million in 2019, an increase of 12% on the 2018 allocation and allowing for total expenditure of some €339 million on culture, language and heritage in 2019. As part of that overall funding, the organisation referred to by the Deputy received an additional 11% in 2019. The cost of increasing the 2019 budget for that organisation by 12% would be €2.4 million.