



**BRITISH-IRISH  
INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY**

**COMHLACHT IDIR-PHARLAIMINTEACH  
NA BREATAINE AGUS NA hÉIREANN**

---

**THIRTY-SIXTH PLENARY SESSION**

**28 and 29 April 2008**

**White's Hotel, Wexford / Brown's Hotel, Wexford**

---

**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
**(Final Revised Edition)**

**(Produced by the British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association)**

## **Contents**

MONDAY, 28 APRIL 2008

- 7 PLENARY BUSINESS
- 7 ADOPTION OF PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS
- 7 RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS
- 28 TOURISM AS A DRIVER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
- 44 THE DRUGS PROBLEM, ITS EFFECTS AND IMPACT ON OUR COMMUNITIES
- 74 ADDRESS BY MR MARTIN CULLEN TD, MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AND FAMILY AFFAIRS
- 80 ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

TUESDAY, 29 APRIL 2008

- 100 BUSINESS REPORTS FROM CHAIRMEN OF COMMITTEES
- 103 RESPONSES TO PREVIOUS REPORTS
- 104 TWELFTH ANNUAL REPORT
- 104 ADJOURNMENT
  
- 106 ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS NOT REACHED

**MEMBERSHIP OF THE BRITISH-IRISH INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY**

## **Steering Committee**

### **Co-Chairmen**

Mr Niall BLANEY TD

Rt Hon Paul MURPHY MP

### **Vice-Chairmen**

Mr Seymour CRAWFORD TD

Rt Hon Michael MATES MP

Mr Séan O'FEARGHAIL TD

Rt Hon Lord DUBS

Mr Jim O'KEEFFE TD

Mr Robert WALTER MP

A representative from the National Assemblies of Scotland, Wales, Isle of Man and the Channel Islands

### **Full Members**

Mr Brian ADAM MSP

Mr John AUSTIN MP

Mr Tony BALDRY MP

Mr Joe BENTON MP

The Baroness BLOOD MBE

Senator Dan BOYLE

Mr Johnny BRADY TD

Deputy Alan BRECKON

Ms Joan BURTON TD

Mrs Rosemary BUTLER AM

Mr Alun CAIRNS AM

Mr Alistair CARMICHAEL

Senator John CARTY

Senator Donie CASSIDY

Senator John ELLIS

Mr Jeff ENNIS MP

Mr Paul FLYNN MP

Mr Michael GERMAN OBE AM

The Lord GLENTORAN CBE DL

The Baroness GOUDIE

Mr Dominic GRIEVE MP

Deputy Graham GUILLE

Senator Dominic HANNIGAN

Senator Eoghan HARRIS

Mr Brian HAYES TD

Mr Hugh HENRY MSP

Mr Michael D. HIGGINS TD

Mr Séamus KIRK TD

Dr Dai LLOYD AM

Mr Elfyn LLWYD MP

Mr Eddie McGRADY MP

Rt Hon Andrew MACKAY MP  
Mr Andrew MACKINLAY MP  
Dr Martin MANSERGH TD  
Dr Alasdair McDONNELL MLA, MP  
Mr Barry McELDUFF MLA  
Mr Dinny McGINLEY TD  
Mr Joe McHUGH TD  
Mrs Rosemary MCKENNA CBE MP  
Mr David McLEITCHIE MSP  
Mr Alasdair MORGAN MSP  
Mr Arthur MORGAN TD  
Mr Sean NEESON MLA  
Senator Francie O'BRIEN  
Baroness Ó CATHÁIN OBE  
Mr Charlie O'CONNOR TD  
Mr Fergus O'DOWD TD  
Dr Rory O'HANLON TD  
Mr Michael RING TD  
Mr John ROBERTSON MP  
Hon Stephen Charles RODAN MHK  
Mr Chris RUANE MP  
Mr Iain SMITH MSP  
The Lord SMITH OF CLIFTON  
Mr Noel TREACY TD  
Mrs Joyce WATSON AM

#### **Associate Members**

Mr Alasdair ALLAN MSP  
Mr Dave ANDERSON MP  
Mr Barry ANDREWS TD  
Mr Chris ANDREWS TD  
Mr Alex ATWOOD MLA SDLP  
Mr Henry BELLINGHAM MP  
The Lord BEW  
Ms Aine BRADY TD  
Senator Martin BRADY  
Mr Dara CALLEARY TD  
Senator Ivor CALLELY  
Mr Joe CAREY TD  
Mr Malcolm CHISHOLM MSP  
Mr Willie CLARKE MLA  
Mr Sean CONNICK TD  
The Lord COPE of Berkeley  
Sir Patrick CORMACK MP  
Mr Michael D'ARCY TD  
Mr Alun DAVIES AM  
Mr Jim DEVINE MP  
Mr Jim DOBBIN MP  
Lord DONOGHUE

Mr Mark DURKAN MP  
Senator Geraldine FEENEY  
Mr Frank FEIGHAN TD  
Mr Roger GODSIFF MP  
The Lord GORDON of STRATHBLANE  
Mr John GROGAN MP  
Senator John HANAFIN  
The Baroness HARRIS OF RICHMOND  
Ms Bethan JENKINS AM  
Senator Cecilia KEAVENEY  
Senator Alan KELLY  
Ms Julie KIRKBRIDE MP  
Senator Terry LEYDEN  
Mr Eddie LOWEY MLC  
Mr John McFALL MP  
Mr Michael McMAHON MSP  
Mr Darren MILLAR AM  
Connetable Daniel Joseph MURPHY  
Mr Stephen O'BRIEN MP  
Senator Joe O'REILLY  
Mr Albert OWEN MP  
Senator John Paul PHELAN  
Senator Phil PRENDERGAST  
Ms Jenny RANDERSON AM  
Senator Eugene REGAN  
Senator Shane ROSS  
Mr David RUFFLEY MP  
Mr Alex SALMOND MP  
Mr Jim SHERIDAN MP  
Ms Shirley-Anne SOMERVILLE MSP  
Deputy Jack HONEYBILL

## **Officials**

### **Joint Clerks to the Body**

Mr Eoin Faherty  
Ms Alda Barry

### **Clerks of the Devolved Institutions**

Mr Robert Lloyd-Williams  
Mr Sean Wixted

### **Committee Clerks to the Body**

#### **Committee A: Sovereign Matters**

Ms Hilary O'Brien  
Ms Nerys Welfoot

#### **Committee B: European Affairs**

Miss Rhiannon Hollis

Ms Deirdre Clarke

**Committee C: Economic**

Ms Deirdre Clarke

Ms Tracey Garratty

**Committee D: Environmental and Social**

Miss Audrey Nelson

Ms Deirdre Clarke

**Irish and British Secretariat**

Ms Jullee Clarke

Mrs Amanda Healy

Sir Michael Davies KCB

**Media Adviser**

Mr Mike Burns

**Official Reporters**

Nick Beech

Hugh Cronin

Janet Foster

Fintan Murray

Siân Richards

Gareth Wigmore

**MONDAY, 28 APRIL 2008**

*The Body met at 8.45 am.*

**PLENARY BUSINESS**

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** I remind Members that the proceedings of the Body do not attract parliamentary privilege. Since the last plenary

conference

of the Body, there has been one change in membership: Mr Michael D Higgins TD has replaced Mr Emmet Stagg TD.

I welcome you all to Wexford, which is known as the sunny south-east of Ireland. That may not be the case today, but one never knows. I extend a warm welcome to my Co-Chairman, Peter Hain. I am delighted to have someone on board with such a great CV; he is one of the unsung heroes in Northern Ireland who played a vital role and provided a strong hand when it was needed. We are delighted to have such an individual on board.

In accordance with rule 2(a), the following Associate Members have accepted the invitation of the Steering Committee to assume the powers and responsibilities of Members for the entire sitting: Mr Sean Connick TD; Senator Martin Brady; Senator Cecilia Keaveney; Senator Phil Prendergast; Lord Bew; Lord Gordon; Mr Alex Attwood MLA; and Mr Willie Clarke MLA. There will be a suspension for a group photograph at 11.15 am.

### **ADOPTION OF PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS**

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** Members have received a copy of the proposed Programme of Business. Is the proposed Programme of Business agreed?

*Programme of Business agreed.*

### **RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS**

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** It would be helpful if Members who wish to speak in the debate, who have not already given their names to the Clerks, could do so now. The Steering Committee agreed to impose a time limit of three minutes on speeches, with eight minutes for opening and winding-up speeches.

**Mr Seymour Crawford TD:** I beg to move

*That the Body:*

*in this the tenth anniversary year of the Good Friday Agreement, welcomes the immense and historic political progress made on these islands in the past decade;*

*welcomes the continued successes of the power-sharing Executive in Northern Ireland, which is taking forward its work programme in an inclusive way, for the benefit of all people in Northern Ireland*

*calls on all parties to work together to implement the outstanding elements of both the Good Friday and St Andrews Agreement;*

*looks forward to the political parties moving to complete the process of devolution through the devolution of policing and justice powers, as agreed at St Andrews;*

*welcomes the continuing engagement of the international community in the consolidation of peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland, in particular the European Commission Task Force on Northern Ireland and the engagement of the US administration in the forthcoming US Investment Conference, which takes place in Belfast from 7 to 9 May;*

*welcomes and supports the ongoing programmes and initiatives of North/South and East-West co-operation on these islands recognising the potential of the British-Irish Council for strengthening further relations between its members, welcomes the strategic review of the BIC and looks forward to active engagement with the Council;*

*looks forward to continuing its consultations with the Northern Ireland Assembly, the governments and other elected institutions, with a view to early establishment, under the name of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, as the East-West parliamentary forum, embracing the totality of relationships on these islands, as envisaged in the St Andrews Agreement.*

I also add my welcome to Mr Peter Hain MP and agree that he played a vital role in the negotiations that led to the St Andrews Agreement and its outworkings.

It is the tenth anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, and one has to pay tribute to all those who were involved in that agreement. I include former Prime Ministers and Taoisigh, and I especially want to mention An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern as he bows out of the major role that he played and to wish his successor, Brian Cowen, all the best. I also welcome the continued success of the power-sharing Executive led by Dr Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness. It started on 8 May 2007, which means that it has now been in place for almost a year. It is a strange situation, but Ian Paisley is also bowing out. I wish his successor, Peter Robinson, all the best in his work.

The power-sharing agreement has brought huge benefits not only to Northern Ireland but to the island of Ireland and to the overall situation in these islands. It means that the business of Northern Ireland is being dealt with by people who better understand the situation there. They have amicably agreed their first Budget, and that shows that the situation can, and must, work. We can only hope that the personnel who will take their positions in the next three weeks or so will

have the same sort of relationship — one that will allow continued movement.

There is still much to do to finish the work of the Good Friday Agreement and the St

Andrews Agreement. It is important that everyone works together to ensure that that is done. In that context, there must be movement on the devolution of policing and justice powers. Those powers were to be devolved in early May, but, in light of the new structures and the new situation, it is difficult to see how that date can be met. However, the devolution of policing and justice powers remains an important issue that must be resolved.

There are still difficulties with policing and justice in Northern Ireland, especially with regard to the unsolved situation regarding the Paul Quinn murder and, unfortunately, many others. The issue could be progressed if there were more openness and trust within the structures. There has been a close and active relationship between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Garda Síochána

in the aftermath of the Paul Quinn murder—possibly for the first time ever. The Garda Síochána has worked with the PSNI across the border on home visits, for instance.

If people came forward with information on who murdered Paul Quinn, Andrew Burns in Donegal, and others across the island, that would provide a major breakthrough for policing and justice. It would break down the barriers of secrecy and fear that have existed for years. I say “fear” without any fear of contradiction, because there is fear among those who might have the knowledge and might want to help.

I also welcome the continued engagement of the international community. The forthcoming US–Northern Ireland investment conference, which will take place in

Belfast from 7 to 9 May, is important. I welcome the commitment of US personnel to

invest in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, I welcome the commitment made by Brian

Cowen, the Minister of Finance — albeit not for much longer — after his meeting with Peter Robinson when he said that efforts would be made to improve the employment situation. People in employment are less likely to be involved in other activities.

We must remember that with all the talk of peace in Northern Ireland, there are more peace walls now than ever before. The creation of employment through investment, whether it be through the finance groups in the Republic or from the US, is extremely important. I come from the border region, and I cannot help but say that I hope that the potential investors in Northern Ireland will also consider investing in the counties that are immediately south of the border, because they too suffered significantly. The ongoing programmes of North/South and east-

west co-operation on these islands are extremely important, and the Body has a role to play. I will simply say that there have been ongoing efforts to deal with that issue.

Co-Chairman, you and our two colleagues from the UK met personnel in Stormont —

Sir Reg Empey, Peter Robinson, Mark Durkan, Pat Doherty, Sean Neeson and others.

The meetings were extremely useful, and we considered the possibility of our Unionist colleagues at last becoming full members of the Body. We also talked about

changing the name and some of the rules of the Body to ensure that Unionists would

be involved and to create an atmosphere that will facilitate their participation. Even

more importantly, the east-west parliamentary link that was envisaged in the Good

Friday Agreement and St Andrews Agreement would be strengthened, and the Assembly and all the institutions on all the islands would play their role in that new context.

We had extremely positive meetings. Matters have been held back because of what

happened in Northern Ireland with Dr Paisley's changeover, but I have no doubt that

the Co-Chairmen can work with others in the Executive to resolve that issue in the

not-too-distant future — and, I hope, once and for all. Thereby, the Body could represent everybody on these islands and make progress.

I apologise for taking so long, but it is important that the Body knows exactly where

we stand on that final issue and that we are working towards it.

**Mr Robert Walter MP:** I will keep my remarks reasonably brief. This is a very good motion; it covers all that it should, outlines where the Body currently stands, and reflects a much more positive outlook. However, there is a danger that someone from outside the Body could read the motion as almost “motherhood and apple pie” and that everything is fine and we are moving forward. There is a danger that we could become somewhat complacent.

I will focus on two aspects towards the end of the motion. We need more information about the British-Irish Council. We must give it some kind of parliamentary oversight, and it is entirely appropriate that the Body should see itself as scrutinising what goes on in the Council. Perhaps because it can do that, or should do that, the Council might become a more effective body and be recognised as such.

The Secretary of State in the British Government who is responsible for the activities of the British-Irish Council is our former Co-Chairman, Paul Murphy. If we can utilise his good offices, we could establish a more realistic relationship with the Council. It could, perhaps, present us with a biannual or annual report of its activities, and we could then question Ministers and thereby try to create a parliamentary dimension to its work.

The last paragraph of the motion refers to the Body looking forward. We have talked about that endlessly, and the last piece of the jigsaw is the two main Unionist parties in the North joining the Body. Given the St Andrews Agreement, there is no fundamental reason why they should not be involved. We should set a time limit, and say that at, or after, our next plenary conference, we resolve to convert the Body into a British-Irish parliamentary assembly, and that it will form an east-west parliamentary forum. That should not be delayed, so that when we meet in Ireland in the spring of 2009, we will do so as a British-Irish parliamentary assembly.

**Mr Alasdair Morgan MSP:** I want to address the future development of the Body in light of developments in the peace process and the ongoing constitutional developments in the United Kingdom. The Body continues in what may be referred to as its “traditional” role. Seymour Crawford pointed out that there are ongoing issues and even fragilities. Those of us in the devolved legislatures in the UK and the Crown dependencies share common humanitarian interests in the development of the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement.

As legislators, the job that we are paid to do also requires a different focus, which is referred to in the last three paragraphs of the motion. As elected representatives, all of us have the job of scrutinising our respective Executives or Administrations. As Robert Walter said, the leaders of those Administrations or Executives are beginning to meet more often under the aegis of the British-Irish Council, which provides a possible role for us in scrutinising its decisions and deliberations.

Until now, that has been difficult for us, because of the seemingly ad hoc and random pattern of meetings of the British-Irish Council. The creation of a permanent secretariat for that body gives us the hope that there will now be a coherent pattern of meetings and a coherent programme, which will afford us a scrutinising role and will, perhaps, enable us to drive at least part of its agenda.

Finally, as devolution develops in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and perhaps

elsewhere, there are different opinions in the Body as to how devolution will develop — or not, as the case may be. The Body will continue to provide us with a forum in which to discuss the many interests that all of us in this archipelago share, regardless of the ongoing constitutional changes that may occur.

*9.00 am*

**Mr Noel Treacy TD:** I endorse the Co-Chairman's welcome to all our visitors from Britain and Northern Ireland. This is my first opportunity to attend a meeting of the Body, and I am delighted to be here as Chairman of the Oireachtas's Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. I also endorse what my colleague, Deputy Seymour Crawford, said about the huge contribution that so many people made to bringing peace to this island and to improving the relations between the UK and Ireland, which are at their best ever.

I pay tribute to the Co-Chairman, Mr Peter Hain, with whom I had the privilege of working on strand 2 issues. I also pay tribute to all the Prime Ministers and Ministers who were involved in the peace process over many years. After 10 years of peace and progress, I pay a particular tribute to the outgoing Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern, and the former Prime Minister of the UK, Mr Tony Blair. I have been in politics for the past quarter of a century, and those two leaders have changed the culture of politics and the relationships between these islands for ever.

We have gathered in a collective effort to improve relations, generate dialogue and a new impetus, and form new partnerships, which creates a huge opportunity for us all as we advance together. By taking into account the historical relationships among our islands and recognising that the European Union is critical to all our futures, we can work together, as elected Members in different Parliaments and forums, through this Body, and others, for mutual benefit to maximise opportunities from our relationships with the European Union as well as our relationships with one another.

There is much work to be done to develop an inclusive operation on the island of Ireland to ensure that there is full partnership and inclusivity not only in the Assembly but particularly in the Government of Northern Ireland. It is our fondest wish that all political parties in Northern Ireland actively engage with all the bodies that have been established to ensure that we can work together to improve the opportunities for every citizen on this island and fulfil their desire that peace be sustainable and that progress and prosperity can be delivered in the future.

The Government of Ireland and the Dáil are committed to the devolution of policing as soon as possible. That is very important. We must take into account the changes in dynamics of political leadership in Northern Ireland: I pay tribute to the outgoing First Minister, Dr Ian Paisley, and wish him every success in the future. I also wish Mr Peter Robinson, as the incoming First Minister, every success. We look forward to working with Mr Peter Robinson and his colleagues and the deputy First Minister, Mr McGuinness, to ensure that we fulfil the desire of our people for lasting peace, equity in the delivery of services, and justice for everyone on the island, in partnership with the United Kingdom.

**Senator Cecilia Keaveney:** Go raibh maith agat, a Chomh-Chathaoirligh. I support the motion. However, my only gripe is that we are keeping the people away from the core of the developments. As politicians, we sometimes get wrapped up in politics and political successes. Although there have been celebrations to recognise the 10-year anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement — and correctly so — there was no social event to congratulate those people who voted for it and made it happen. That might sound naive because the DUP did not support the Good Friday Agreement at the time, but now that party is in Government. Fianna Fáil had a slogan, “People before politics”, and it is important that we keep the people at the heart of political issues.

The tenth anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement has passed, and the ordinary lives of many people have changed positively because of the work of a few extraordinary people. Given that our party leader, Bertie Ahern, is stepping down, I credit him for being at the helm, but I also recognise the other people who were involved in bringing about the present situation. I emphasise that the job is not finished; in congratulating ourselves on 10 years since the Good Friday Agreement, we might feel that we can dust it down, put it on the shelf and move on to something else.

Policing and justice are ready to be devolved. Anyone who watched the BBC’s ‘Panorama’ on 7 April will have seen that 17 peace walls have been built since the

Good Friday Agreement. Indeed, "peace wall" is an anomalous title for such structures. The sectarianism and bigotry in certain locations is possibly worse than it was before the Good Friday Agreement. We must examine the cost of segregation, and educate schoolchildren about the other side of the community. My vested interest is that I am undertaking a project under the aegis of the Council of Europe on how history should be taught in areas of recent conflict.

There are people who need to be educated on what the other side is; there are people who have been through the worst of the Troubles and want peace; and there are people in between. The last group of people, probably aged between 18 and 25, are too young to have experienced the worst of the violence but have left the school system before teaching about the other side has commenced. We must target that group in whatever way possible. Community development in the North employs 30,000 people and has 70,000 volunteers.

It is important that disaffected people be placed at the core of what we are trying to achieve. For example, if people have good jobs and enjoy a good standard of living, the peace process will bed down more easily. I hope that the forthcoming US-Northern Ireland investment conference in Belfast will be beneficial in that regard. Indeed, I hope that the corporation tax rate in Donegal will encourage some of those visiting investors to come to the north-west so that we too can benefit; that is my plug for the north-west.

Politics is happening, and North/South and east-west co-operation is important. I welcome the progress that has been made. However, the job is not finished, and, as the old football metaphor states, we must not take our eye off the ball. Go raibh maith agat.

**The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Peter Hain MP):** I am grateful for the generosity and courtesy that has been shown towards me. I apologise for the early departure of my British Parliament colleagues — unfortunately, the Whips are misbehaving, and they are required elsewhere — but Michael Mates and I are staying to thank you all for the traditional Irish hospitality that has been provided.

In the first few weeks that Niall and I have worked together, we have cracked a few problems. Indeed, possibly the only problem that we have not cracked is the fact

that he is a Manchester United supporter, and I support Chelsea; we are locked in a bitter struggle at the moment. I echo the congratulations and praise that have been extended to the Taoiseach. I worked closely with him as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland from 2005 to 2007, and particularly in the final few months, which brought about the amazing transformation. Mr Ahern is an outstanding leader; indeed, he is one of the most outstanding of all Irish leaders. He showed courage, was prepared to take risks, and his humanity helped to carry us through.

I last attended the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body as Secretary of State. Since its inception, the Body has played a valuable role in bringing people together, building trust, enabling people to network, and taking policy agendas forward. The building of trust and friendship has been its most important contribution. The trust and friendship between London and Dublin is probably closer and deeper than it has ever been in history.

We should take great pride in what has been achieved. This morning, many Members expressed a desire for the Body to adopt a more outward-looking approach, which is an issue that has also surfaced over the past few weeks during informal consultations with a number of Members and with people in London and Dublin,

We must constantly work to strengthen east-west and North/South relations. However, these small islands — especially the island of Ireland — exist in a big globalised world. China and India have a combined population of more than 1,000 million people, while the UK and the Republic of Ireland have a combined population of approximately 60 million people. Therefore, as a group, we must consider common agendas.

We must consider how we can develop economically by building on the transformation of the Irish and, indeed, the British economy over the past 10 years.

We must consider how we take that forward, ensuring that Northern Ireland also benefits, despite facing fierce competition and massive changes.

Since the use of nuclear power on this island has been ruled out, we must consider how we can provide secure and sustainable energy sources. Can the marine-current turbine installed in Strangford Lough — a decision for which I was responsible — be replicated and used elsewhere? There is immense potential for tidal, wind and wave

power, as well as other renewable energy forms, around the island. How can the UK and the Republic of Ireland work together to develop that potential? How can we have a common agenda on issues such as energy, climate change and security, particularly in relation to drug smuggling?

In an era when Europe, I hope, will play a leading role in taking forward an agenda of progressive internationalism, the Body must examine ways to develop greater cooperation between Ireland and Britain within Europe. We worked closely together on negotiations for the EU treaty, which, in my capacity as Co-Chairman, I strongly urge the people of Ireland to support. Over the past few years, we have co-operated in an unprecedented way on European policy. We must look at ways to build common agendas for some of those issues.

The Body has a unique and important role to play, but we must change in order to do that. I hope that we can take that forward by adopting the motion and in our discussions.

*9.15 am*

**Mr Arthur Morgan TD:** Go raibh maith agat, a Chomh-Chathaoirligh. I welcome Peter Hain and acknowledge the experience that he will bring to his new role as Co-Chairman of the Body. I also welcome the other new Members who are present here today, including my colleague, Willie Clarke, who is an MLA for South Down. I also want to acknowledge the outstanding contribution that Taoiseach Bertie Ahern has made to the peace process and subsequent developments.

I welcome the motion, in particular the clarity on the transfer of policing and justice powers in accordance with the St Andrews Agreement.

I agree with Robert Walter and Alasdair Morgan that it would be particularly useful if the Body were to play a scrutiny role in the British-Irish Council, because I do not think that such a mechanism is in place. However, a parliamentary question about that will help to clarify the situation.

I am aware that changes to the DUP leadership have yet to be formally completed; however, it appears that the transition will be smooth, which I welcome. Such events can create turbulence, but there appears to have been little or none, which has contributed to the continuing stability of the Assembly.

The US–Northern Ireland investment conference on 7 to 9 May provides an opportunity to develop the North's economy and, perhaps, closer links with the South's. I am sure that Members would support the useful purpose that that would serve.

I agree that a step change to the Body's activities is required. Mind you, this morning's 7.45 am start was terrific, and a huge amount of work was done over breakfast. Perhaps an early start should be institutionalised as part of how the Body does business — although I hear some grunts of discontent at that suggestion.

I sit on Committee C, which will be dealing with the issues that Peter Hain outlined: new sources of energy and, in particular, the grossly under-tapped resource of tidal power, which requires significant development. I wish Members who must leave early for parliamentary reasons a safe journey, and those of us who remain will continue the work. Go raibh maith agat.

**Baroness Ó Catháin:** I listened avidly to everything that was said this morning, and my only problem was with the apparent air of complacency in many statements. Who would authorise the Body to scrutinise the British-Irish Council? Would it have to be done through Parliament? That is a minor issue.

More importantly, genuine, relevant problems in the world are not being addressed. Yesterday, every Member who flew over from London received a copy of the 'Sunday Independent', and I have my copy here. It contains a message from the Irish Farmers' Association about the destruction of jobs and the risk to the rural economy. A huge amount of work is being done on food sourcing, and it and energy supply have the highest priority. Committee C is examining energy supplies and will act positively, but I will leave the Chairman to talk about it.

Similarly, the Body must be aware of the plight of the farming community on both islands. However, the subject has not been mentioned, and it seems strange that it is left to someone who has come from Westminster to make that point. BIIPB is the kind of body that should be able to get its act together to examine the overall problem. I am not talking about the European community, but about sourcing food from our own resources. People in other parts of the world are genuinely starving, and we continue to consider biomass as an option, despite the fact that it

depletes the production of food for the third world, fourth world and fifth world.

Perhaps the Body could take a few minutes to consider the global issues that face both islands, such as the credit crunch and housing problems, neither of which has been addressed. I wonder what contribution BIIPB can make to the farming, economic and banking issues that will probably occupy more of our time and energy over the next 12 months than anything else.

**Mr Johnny Brady TD:** Baroness Ó Catháin talked about the difficulties being experienced by the farming community in rural Ireland. Perhaps our colleagues from Great Britain will speak to Mr Mandelson about the destruction that he intends to wreak on rural Ireland. The proposals that he made during the World Trade Organization talks will have a detrimental effect on rural Ireland. I spoke to BIIPB colleagues who are members of the Committee for Agriculture and Development in Northern Ireland, and they are extremely concerned about Mr Mandelson's proposals too as, I am sure, are parts of rural Great Britain. I want people who have access to Mr Mandelson to stress to him that his proposals will destroy farming in rural Ireland.

In Ireland, 50,000 jobs will be lost and rural communities will lose €50 million. That will have a detrimental effect on rural Ireland. I am, therefore, delighted to support what Baroness Ó Catháin stated, and everything will be done to ensure that rural Ireland is kept alive.

**Dr Alasdair McDonnell MLA:** I welcome the work that the Body does. As a relative newcomer — this is only my second time to be in attendance — I welcome the sustained interest, attention and support that the Body gives to changes in Northern Ireland. Those changes have been very much for the better. From my previous attendance, and from this weekend, it is clear that there is still a tremendous body of goodwill and interest in the progression of events in Northern Ireland. Some work has been done, but there is much still to do.

As other Members mentioned, I emphasise the need for devolution to be completed — by that, I mean the devolution of policing and justice powers. The issues concerning policing and justice need to be resolved reasonably quickly. I urge all Members of the Body to give whatever support they can to the swift devolution of

policing and justice powers.

There is an ongoing need for strengthening relationships and the development of mutual insight, understanding and support across the islands. I heard that at November's plenary conference in Oxford, and I heard it again yesterday and today.

We are a relatively small collection of people — approximately 60 million — when compared with countries such as China and India.

Nevertheless, in light of the tremendous work that has been done by a number of Administrations in Ireland and Britain — particularly in the past 10 years by Prime Minister Tony Blair and Taoiseach Bertie Ahern — relationships have transformed. I hope that they continue to transform for the better.

The renaming of the Body would be helpful. The participation of Unionists — and the loss of the suspicions that have prevented them from being here — will certainly strengthen the Body. To echo comments that were made by Baroness Ó Catháin, major challenges still exist. The question is whether we, as a Body, feel capable or willing to take up those challenges.

Those challenges are not only in building, strengthening or improving relationships but in dealing with realities, whether those are energy, food or other similar challenges. Those realities are sometimes bigger than an individual Government or Parliament. If we consider the radical changes to the energy supply that have taken place over the past 12 to 18 months, we see that they present us with a massive challenge.

That is only one of the major challenges that the Body could and should work at, because energy is an example of an issue that extends far wider than an individual Parliament, Government or nation. If that is to be solved, or even contained and faced, it will require a great deal of mutual co-operation and support.

I attended a meeting of Committee C this morning. The potential exists for us to tackle issues concerning wave and wind power. Wave power, in particular, is tremendous. It affects areas of shared sovereignty or ownership.

I urge Members of the Body to take stock and to come back to our next session with renewed energy and with the commitment to identify some of those problems and to get to work to deal with them.

**Mr Barry McElduff MLA:** I support the motion, which is comprehensive and well considered. It deals with all the important aspects of our work.

Members have said that we are 10 years on from the Good Friday Agreement and that that is a significant milestone. It is healthy and pleasing to report that the Stormont Assembly is functioning well, as are the North/South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council. Everyone has mentioned the importance of securing the devolution of policing and justice powers as just one of the outstanding elements of the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement.

*9.30 am*

As a Nationalist/Republican from the North of Ireland, I am pleased that the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement is up and running. As Northern Nationalists, our sensitivities are often taken for granted.

I look forward to a time — sooner rather than later — when progress is made in establishing voting rights for people in the North of Ireland in Irish presidential elections, and I urge that Committee to examine that issue as soon as possible.

We are discussing today the changing role and character of the Body. We have all become used to the term “the Body”, and we may end up calling it the parliamentary assembly. The Programme for Government, the Budget and the investment strategy were three key, overarching Government policies that the Assembly in Belfast in its totality agreed and that the 10 departmental Ministers and the four Ministers who operate in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister also agreed.

We would do well to listen carefully to Peter Hain on the economic challenges that lie ahead after the US investment conference, and we should also pay attention to developments in China and India. I acknowledge the leadership of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, whose four Ministers are Ian Paisley and his junior Minister, Jeffrey Donaldson, and Martin McGuinness and his junior Minister, Gerry Kelly. I am pleased, too, that DUP Ministers have participated fully and actively in the North/South Ministerial Council.

Cecilia Keaveney mentioned the people. Sinn Féin recently held nine public meetings

in the North to engage with people, 10 years on from the Good Friday Agreement, about the issues that matter to them. There was a discernible trend at those meetings that people discussed the constitutional question and dealt with the national question. However, they also demonstrated a greater appetite for a discussion of social and economic matters. Another important issue that was raised at those meetings was the question of truth. People are anxious to establish the truth about past events, not least in the murders of the human rights lawyers Pat Finucane and Rosemary Nelson.

Those are some of the issues that remain to be resolved. The people who attended the large public meetings throughout the North expressed their concerns about issues such as all-island co-operation on health, transport, the economy, and on removing obstacles to cross-border mobility in every walk of life. I have deliberately spelt out some of the Nationalist/Republican sensitivities, because those are very often taken for granted.

**Mr Brian Hayes TD:** I wish to put on record the appreciation of everyone in the room, and that of parliamentarians across the Irish Sea, for the work that Peter Hain did when he was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I am delighted that Peter is now working with you, Niall, as Co-Chairman of the Body. He was Secretary of State at a particularly difficult time, and his contribution to the resolution of the outstanding difficulties was important. His work was recognised in the Oireachtas by colleagues on all sides, and I wish to put that on record. The fact that Peter Hain is now a Co-Chairman of the Body will be important for our work in future.

I will repeat a point that Paul Bew made when we were in Oxford. Commenting on the contribution that Bertie Ahern made to the peace process, Mr Bew said that the biggest transformation that had taken place over the past 10 years had been that of the attitude and mindset of Ulster Unionism towards the South. If there is one tribute that I would make to the Taoiseach, it is for the work that he has done to bring about that transformation. Bertie Ahern did not come from a great civil war family; he came with no historical baggage and was seen as an honest broker. We should not underestimate that transformation, because, ultimately, the siege mentality, in effect, had been a huge barrier to the relationships between North and South for many years. Bertie Ahern's role in that regard was very useful at that time, bearing in mind his position as Taoiseach.

I am always amused by the fact that we have a motion on recent political developments. The opening line of this morning's motion reads:

*"in this the tenth anniversary year of the Good Friday Agreement".*

I propose that we get rid of that motion. There is no role for it anymore, nor does anyone have great appetite to speak to it. Committee A, the Sovereign Matters Committee, should take on the role of reporting political developments in the North if its Members feel that an evaluation is necessary. Although issues about the peace process will arise from time to time, we have gone beyond the stage at which such a motion on recent political developments should be tabled automatically. The Body would be better served, as was pointed out earlier, by dealing with substantive issues, such as agriculture or the credit crunch, on a North/South, east-west basis.

A great deal of important work is being done on a North/South basis that will lead to considerable advantages on both sides of the border. However, as other colleagues said, there is no parliamentary oversight and scrutiny of that work. A firm commitment was given at the time of the Good Friday Agreement to have a North/South parliamentary tier that would examine that work and ensure ministerial accountability. We have gone beyond the point of calling for a North/South parliamentary tier. The Assembly and the Unionist parties therein have a responsibility to resolve the issue and get that parliamentary tier up and running so that there is some genuine parliamentary accountability of the work that is being done and of the substantial sums of money that are being spent on a North/South basis.

**Dr Rory O'Hanlon TD:** The low-key nature of the debate is an indication of the progress that has been made.

I remember the years when we stood for three or four hours debating this matter, and everybody who spoke had something to say about the life-and-death issues that were affecting the people on this island at the time. It is encouraging that we do not have those issues to discuss any more.

I join with Members who spoke previously in paying tribute to everyone who has been involved in the process. Co-Chairman Peter Hain referred to the Body, and there is no doubt that it made a major contribution to building a good relationship between the Parliaments in Dublin and London, particularly in the early years. That helped to make it easier for the Governments and Ministers involved to get on with the job of trying to find a solution to the problem.

There has been a phenomenal sea change on the issue of policing, and we should recognise the input that Chris Patten made to that. I want to see responsibility for policing devolved to the Northern Ireland Executive. We now have an

opportunity to bring normality to such places as south Armagh where there has not been proper policing for the past 30 or 40 years. The Body could perhaps examine how that could be done.

There is a place for even closer co-operation between the gardaí and the PSNI. Their co-operation was demonstrated in the recent investigation into the murder of Paul Quinn. The gardaí crossed the border with the PSNI and carried out house-to-house investigations, which made a valuable contribution to the investigation.

Good work is being done between the North and the South, particularly in investment in the seven all-Ireland bodies. That work should be developed further. It is encouraging to see the Southern Government investing in Northern Ireland's road network. In fact, Co-Chairman Blaney, you will see the benefit of the improvements to the road from Northern Ireland to Donegal in your constituency of Donegal North-East. A great deal of excellent work is being done, and it is hoped that it will continue. The refurbishment of the Ulster Canal is a further indication of the economic progress that has been made, as is the forthcoming investment conference in Belfast.

However, we should consider such co-operation in many other areas, including health, for example. It is interesting to look back to the time long before the Good Friday Agreement and just after the Anglo-Irish Agreement when Sir Richard Needham was Minister of Health and Social Security in Northern Ireland. I was the health Minister in the South at that time, and we used to meet twice a year. It was our view that Ireland was an island of 5 million people where resources were scarce and finite. We also thought that we would never have sufficient resources to develop the health services and that we should look at ways to co-operate in that area. Indeed, there were numerous examples of instances in which co-operation had occurred already. For example, the crushing of kidney stones for the whole island was carried out in Dublin, and total body irradiation for children was available at the Belvoir Park Hospital in Belfast. An outstanding example of the sort of opportunities that existed — and still do — arose when we were buying a magnetic resonance imaging machine for one of the Dublin hospitals, because it so happened that one was being bought for the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast at the same time. The last paragraph in the tender document for that piece of equipment stated that a saving could be made if two machines were bought. A saving of £100,000 for each jurisdiction was made — and that was 20 years ago. Therefore, many opportunities exist, and the BIIPB should consider some of those opportunities in the future.

**Mr Eddie McGrady MP:** As previous contributors have done, I endorse the words of thanks to the Taoiseach, to Tony Blair, the former Prime Minister, and to their predecessors in various Governments, for the enormous commitment, time and energy that they put into ensuring the completion of the Good Friday Agreement. I have lived with the concepts behind the Good Friday Agreement now for some 38 years, and it gives me great satisfaction that the principles that my party established in the 1970s have come to fruition and have now become the political dialogue of all the parties of these islands. That is no mean achievement for a small party.

I remember being present on the morning that the Good Friday Agreement was signed. I will always remember the huge commitment that both Prime Ministers made, especially the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, who, in grave family circumstances, sacrificed his family duties for the sake of making the agreement on that day.

The problem that sometimes arises is that people forget the purpose of the Good Friday Agreement. It is an evolutionary, not a final, process. It is a mechanism whereby the people of this island, particularly the North, learn to live and work together and to accept diversities and differences with real understanding and real acceptance so that we can go forward as a people together. The high watermark of democracy in Ireland was the endorsement of the Good Friday Agreement by the North and the South in joint referenda.

That respect of diversity is apparent to us all now in the way that, in difficult circumstances, a statutorily enforced coalition is working in the North of Ireland. Although my party and I did not receive the electoral rewards of our efforts, it is nonetheless pleasing that violence has subsided almost to the point where there is no, or very little, paramilitary activity. Peace walls still exist to separate communities, and it is our job to evolve a greater and further understanding that will enable those walls between the ghettoised communities to fall, which I think will happen in due course.

The Good Friday Agreement is evolutionary, and some significant elements of it have not yet been completed. One of the greatest pleasures in my political life was participating in the setting up of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and witnessing the huge change that that has made in security and justice in Northern Ireland. However, the ultimate powers of policing and justice must be restored in accordance with the Good Friday Agreement, and, indeed, the St Andrews

Agreement. Unfortunately, when the St Andrews Agreement was made, the two Governments allowed parties to veto — as has happened — the transfer of policing and justice, which was due to happen in the next couple of weeks. Please God, however, that will develop as a natural outcome of the ongoing process.

Another issue that was included in the original concept of the agreement but that seems to have been forgotten is the question of the victims, North and South, of the 30 years of physical violence that was visited upon us by those who are now in power. Perhaps those victims have not been forgotten so much as less-effectively dealt with. However, it is important that the Governments, North and South, address immediately the issue of victims. Unless the victims are listened to and their continued suffering and stress addressed and, in some way, healed, we will carry a very deep wound in the body politic for the years to come.

*9.45 am*

Unionist parties will participate in the Body, and other similar bodies, as and when it is politically comfortable and convenient for them to do so. They will participate as and when they feel that they will be accepted with full and honest equality. Although I know that those parties will be treated equally, we must ensure that they understand that. That will, undoubtedly, happen in the near future.

I am a relatively new Member of the Body, which correctly addressed Ireland's past internal turmoil. However, given that the Body now represents all these islands of western Europe, it must incorporate an external agenda. Although the harmonisation of world problems will remain the remit of sovereign Governments, the Governments that are represented in this association must encourage that move.

Several issues are endangering world security, and we also have matters such as food shortages to deal with. Do Members have an opinion on how to address agriculture and food production on these islands? How do we address the current fuel crisis? All jurisdictions must formulate a cohesive plan to tackle climate change. After the signing of the Good Friday Agreement 10 years ago, our political position has evolved rapidly.

**Mr Dinny McGinley TD:** Along with other Members, I support the motion. The fact that we all agree is an indication of the progress that has been made in Northern Ireland. If my colleague, Barry McElduff, and I can agree on such a motion, it is

concrete and welcome evidence of progress in Northern Ireland. We are both from the North — Barry politically and myself geographically — and I have many years of experience of Northern Ireland's problems.

I travel through the North weekly, and it is reassuring to see that normality there has been restored. The army does not occupy the streets as it did 10, 15, 20, 25 and 30 years ago. It served a useful purpose at the time, but its absence demonstrates the level of progress. The work of the PSNI is also an indication and illustration of what has been achieved. Previous contributions outlined the major steps taken by brave people in the past 20 or 30 years to restore peace and normality to Northern Ireland.

I am old enough to remember what could be called a revolutionary doctrine that was introduced in 1968 or 1969. Paddy Harte — a former Fine Gael colleague from Donegal who was a Member of the BIIPB — and some other close associates of mine introduced the doctrine of no unity without consent. At the time, only Fine Gael accepted it, and it is great that everyone in the room agrees to that doctrine today. People such as Conor Cruise O'Brien — who no longer writes, and I do not know how he is — Garret FitzGerald, Paddy Harte and so on all subscribed to that doctrine. Every party adheres to it today, and that definitely represents progress.

Three major steps have led to the point that we have reached today. I was only on the fringes of politics when the Sunningdale Agreement was reached in 1974. That agreement brought power sharing to Northern Ireland for the first time. It was, admittedly, short-lived, but it created a benchmark, and it was a major milestone.

I remember being in the Dáil in 1985 when the Taoiseach came back to Dublin airport. The Anglo-Irish Agreement had been reached, and, for the first time, our civil servants and departments were being represented and had a role to play in Northern Ireland. After that, the historic Good Friday Agreement was reached, and it all led step by step to where we are today. The contribution of all those people should be recognised, remembered and noted. It is good to see that normality has been restored to Northern Ireland and that it is experiencing an economic resurgence.

I want to see progress being made between the police forces on both sides of the

border. If I may be parochial for a moment or two, I have a couple of comments to make on that point. Several robberies that originated across the border occurred in Donegal, Lifford, Killygordon and in Muff, and they have been discussed in the Dáil.

I hope that whatever co-operation exists between the two police forces will be enhanced and increased to put an end to that sort of activity.

I believe that the Paul Quinn killing was mentioned. There have been two similar cases in my constituency. The previous time I spoke about such matters concerned the murder of Denis Donaldson. Since then, there has been another killing in Donnyloop in Killygordon. I happened to attend a funeral in St Columba's Church in Donnyloop on 12 February 2008. Later that evening, a young man from Strabane was murdered outside that church. Given such events, I hope that co-operation continues at that level between the security forces at both sides of the border.

It is great that we have reached this stage. This Body, having achieved all that it has, needs to redefine itself and keep moving forward. Unfortunately, one vacuum exists at the moment. I hope that, at our next meeting, perhaps, or shortly after, the DUP and the UUP take up their places at the table. In the past five years, I have not been a part of the BIIPB. Before that time, the Body held heated discussions. Now there is consensus and unity, and it is the best sign of the progress that has been achieved. Go raibh maith agat, a Chomh-Chathaoirligh.

**Mr Chris Ruane MP:** I welcome Peter Hain, for whom I was parliamentary private secretary for six years. I recognise many fine qualities in him that will help this Body, or any body that may replace this over the next year, to achieve its aim. I think that Peter would be an asset to such a body. He has many fine qualities. He is a bridge builder, and, to mix and match my mathematical metaphors, he can square circles and — to use that great political word — triangulate. In dealing with eight sovereign bodies in one organisation, those are indeed good qualities.

Tributes have been paid to the people who have moved the peace process on. I echo those tributes to Bertie Ahern, Tony Blair, and to Ian Paisley, who has surprised everyone with the way in which he has grown into his job and become a recognised statesman in these isles.

Ian Paisley was once ahead of me in the queue in the restaurant in the House of Commons. It was at the height of the peace process, at crunch time last year. I told him that I paid tribute to him and was thinking of nominating him for a Nobel Peace Prize — he and Gerry Adams. He huffed and he puffed up, and he said, “I’m not that bad.” I think that both men have gone that extra mile in bringing the peace process to fruition.

Problems still exist, of which policing is one. That needs to be acted on very quickly. There are council estates and other areas in the North that do not have proper policing, and where there is a vacuum or a void. Nature abhors a vacuum. If we do not act quickly on policing, there could be informal policing that is not the type of policing that the Body wants. Rapid progress on this issue is needed, and I urge that to happen.

Peter Hain mentioned the possibility of a British-Irish parliamentary assembly. He and others have said that part of the function of such a body would be to oversee the British-Irish Council, and I endorse that idea. Mr Hain mentioned several areas in which there could be joint co-operation or joint investigation, including the economies, energy, security and climate change. I agree that those areas could be worked on in such a way.

Baroness Ó Catháin mentioned the credit crunch, banking and housing, which are of-the- moment issues. I endorse what she said, but we must also spot issues that are on the horizon. If those issues are put on the radar early, there is more chance of the eight sovereign bodies in the British Isles developing better policies. Biomass, the ageing population, and obesity are three such issues. Departments and Select Committees in those eight sovereign bodies would be concerned that the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body might be treading on their toes, but, if we pick our issues carefully, consider best practice and spread it around the isles, the Body would be doing the British Isles a favour.

Exciting times are ahead. If we change the Body to increase its remit and size, I urge that all our reviews and Committees be given recommendations for action. Progress on past policies must be revisited and reviewed, and perhaps consideration should be given to increasing our budget, to commissioning research and to meeting more often to develop a more professional approach.

**Dr Martin Mansergh TD:** We can all look back with satisfaction, pride and gratitude at the principles that have guided the consolidation of peace over the past 10 years. Last night, on a radio programme called ‘Talking History’, which was broadcast on Newstalk, I debated with people from the North the role of Carson and how the historic compromise of home rule within the Union was defeated between 1912 and 1914. The current generation comes from a different starting point; after many tragedies and tribulations, it has achieved a historic compromise. Even by 1921, the Nationalist side had begun to accept in principle that there should be no coercion; the principle of consent was mentioned in the debates of that year. The difficulty was that consent does not only apply to the majority; it meant the consent of a minority, particularly given that Northern Ireland came to comprise many areas in which the minority was the majority — not that the electoral arrangements always recognised that.

The historic compromise that was achieved under the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement has ended watertight, across-the-board, back-to-back partition. It has replaced the system of domination of one community over another, and it has produced, perhaps for the first time in history, relaxed and productive British-Irish relations. We are witnessing already the changing of the guard North and South. The two Finance Ministers, who have already established a good working relationship and are focused on such practicalities as infrastructure and inward investment, will take over as leaders in the next few weeks.

*10.00 am*

Recently, in my constituency, there was a short reflection of the Patten policing reforms when the joint policing committee, which was established under our legislation to mirror the district policing partnerships in Northern Ireland, held its first meeting in Clonmel. Obviously, there is unfinished business in that matter, and unfulfilled policing and security commitments must be effected. Nevertheless, there is no justification on any side — whether mainstream or dissident — for any paramilitary organisation’s continued existence, still less for any activity.

Finally, as in many of our previous meetings, we look forward to the expansion of the Body to include everyone. That should not be the most difficult hurdle to overcome; comparatively speaking, it should be one of the easiest.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** Before inviting Michael Mates to conclude, I concur with our Irish Vice-Chairperson Seymour Crawford's remarks about meeting the political leaders in Northern Ireland. I thank Lord Dubs and, in particular, Michael Mates for using their clout to set up those meetings, which I believe, in the near future, will lead to bringing on board Members who are not here now.

**Mr Michael Mates MP:** Brian Hayes and Rory O'Hanlon made the point with which

I was going to begin concerning the change that has taken over this Body. The political debate has been quiet; no voices have been raised, there have been no disagreements, and there has not been the same sense of urgency that has existed since the Body came into existence.

As political developments bring peace and stability, it is right that we now consider

— without, as Detta Ó Catháin rightly said, any complacency — how we might readjust our role, and the fact that the political debate in this meeting was scheduled

to last for only one hour is indicative of that change. In the Steering Committee, we

discussed how we might change the Body's emphasis, and the Irish delegates reasonably proposed that, compared with the time spent in political debate, we should spend three times that amount of time discussing drugs, which are a real problem for all societies in these islands. In addition, we will hear a talk about tourism, which again is vital to the prosperity of everybody on this island.

Therefore, although I take some people's point that this Body is not evolving quickly enough, it has been changing, and we will investigate how it can move faster.

Before bringing the debate to an end, rather than summing up what everybody said — I pass on many congratulations to many people, and I hope that no one would

disagree with that — I shall report two points that may be of interest. As the Co-Chairman said, a small group of us, including the Co-Chairman, went to Belfast a month or two ago, when, on one evening, we met Sir Reg Empey and the next day,

we met Peter Robinson. We suggested that the time for Unionism to be expressed

personally — rather than by proxy, as it always has been on this Body — was overdue. Neither of them dissented; however, they both pointed out that the one thing that they did not want was any sort of row between the Unionist parties about how that might come about. They asked us to use our good offices to ensure that the terms in which a formal request might be made would be acceptable to them both. We accepted and are getting on with that. The process has been delayed because, obviously at the time, we did not know that Dr Paisley was going to retire, and, clearly, all potential leaders in the succession process

could do without dealing with such an item.

Therefore, now that it has been established that Peter Robinson will take over as leader of the DUP, we will make a formal approach to both Unionist parties, inviting them to come so that we can explain to them that we are going to re-launch this Body as the British-Irish parliamentary association. Both gentlemen thought that that was perfectly acceptable and a rather good idea, because it removes the last ghosts of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which, as Members will remember, caused the Unionists to boycott this Body from its inception.

The second matter on which it is important to make progress is our relationship with the British-Irish Council. Did I get the name wrong again, Alf?

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** Yes, you did.

**Mr Michael Mates MP:** I do that every time. This Body will become the British-Irish parliamentary assembly. I am very sorry. Thank you for pointing that out. I have managed to get the name wrong in front of almost everyone in the world, and it is very embarrassing.

Returning to our relationship with the British-Irish Council, whether this Body will ever be able to get formal political oversight of it is a big question, because all sorts of vested interests will be involved in that. However, there is no doubt that we must have a better relationship with it and that we must establish our role.

As was said earlier, it is a great help to us that our recent Co-Chairman Paul Murphy is now the Minister responsible for the British-Irish Council. Members will wish to know that he has been approached on the subject of the relationship, and he will come, if invited — and he will be invited — to our meeting in Newcastle. He will see what he can do from his side to ensure that the arrangements between the British-Irish Council and this Body are as productive and effective as possible.

That is the progress that we are trying to make in changing the emphasis of the Body. I am certain that everybody who spoke of the need for that change is absolutely right. We must work on it in the Standing Committee. The British side must work hard to produce an agenda for the autumn meeting in Newcastle that will be relevant and up to date and that will reflect some of the issues that Members have spoken about this morning.

There is a question about whether we need a political debate at all, but that may not require a definite answer, because things can still happen, as they say; we may still need to discuss various political developments. However, I am certain that, in the proper course of events, political debate will have much less influence in this Body, and our Committees, which are even now working on subjects, such as climate change, cross-border co-operation and many others, will be able to carry out more relevant and valuable work, and we will be able to devote much more time to debating those subjects, which are of interest to us all, as this Body develops.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That the Body:*

*in this the tenth anniversary year of the Good Friday Agreement, welcomes the immense and historic political progress made on these islands in the past decade;*

*welcomes the continued successes of the power-sharing Executive in Northern Ireland, which is taking forward its work programme in an inclusive way, for the benefit of all people in Northern Ireland;*

*calls on all parties to work together to implement the outstanding elements of both the Good Friday and St Andrews Agreements;*

*looks forward to the political parties moving to complete the process of devolution through the devolution of policing and justice powers, as agreed at St Andrews;*

*welcomes the continuing engagement of the international community in the consolidation of peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland, in particular the European Commission Task Force on Northern Ireland and the engagement of the US administration in the forthcoming US Investment Conference, which takes place in Belfast from 7 to 9 May; welcomes and supports the ongoing programmes and initiatives of North/South and East-West co-operation on these islands;*

*recognising the potential of the British-Irish Council for strengthening further relations between its members, welcomes the strategic review of the BIC and looks forward to active engagement with the Council;*

*looks forward to continuing its consultations with the Northern Ireland Assembly, the governments and other elected institutions, with a view to early establishment, under the name of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, as the East-West parliamentary forum, embracing the totality of relationships on these islands, as envisaged in the St Andrews Agreement.*

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** I thank Members for their co-operation with the slight change in the agenda this morning. Taoiseach Bertie Ahern was referred to in many of the contributions this morning. He was known for introducing an element of surprise, and the element of surprise worked very well here this morning, and I thank Members for that.

## **TOURISM AS A DRIVER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** I am pleased to welcome Hugh Friel, a fellow Donegal man and a man from my own peninsula — the north Donegal Fanad peninsula. As many of you know, Hugh has put the Kerry Group on the world stage and, since he retired from it, is now chairman of Tourism Ireland, which was set up under the auspices of the Good Friday Agreement. With Hugh, we have the chief executive of Tourism Ireland, Mr Paul O'Toole.

**Mr Hugh Friel:** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen and Co-Chairmen. It is a great pleasure to join you in Wexford this morning, and thank you for inviting me. As the Co-Chairman said, I have Paul O'Toole with me. I hope that he will join me at the end of my presentation in answering any questions.

As chairman of Tourism Ireland, I am here to tell you a little more about the organisation, and to stress its importance in its role in overseas tourism and as a driver for economic development in the South and North of this island. The establishment of Tourism Ireland in 2001 was one of the most heralded outcomes of the Belfast Agreement, and signified a major milestone in the history of tourism on this island. It brought together the best available tourism expertise and resources, North and South, working to a dual mandate — first, to increase the numbers of visitors and tourism revenue to the island of Ireland and, secondly, to support Northern Ireland to realise its tourism potential.

At Tourism Ireland, we have a team of over 150 people with the best expertise and experience available totally focused and committed to marketing the island of Ireland in overseas markets to best effect. The board of Tourism Ireland, which I have the privilege of chairing, comprises leading tourism-industry interests North and South, representatives of Fáilte Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, and experienced business professionals from other fields.

In many ways, tourism is slightly at odds with the economic ambitions of the

21st

century — for example, the ICT industry, the pharmaceutical industry and international financial services. It has very little reliance on imports, and an employment profile very different from any of those industries that I have mentioned. Unlike with most goods and services, the consumer has to travel to experience tourism, and it is an industry that we have an absolute advantage in. Irish tourism cannot relocate to China or anywhere else. It is an industry dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises. Across Europe, SMEs account for 90% of the tourism business. It is that entrepreneurial backbone that roots the sector deep in the social and economic life of the island. That is why it has a unique and vital role in driving the economic development of the regions. People are forever talking about the regions versus the cities and how tourism is spread, but some of the biggest tourist attractions are miles away from Dublin or Belfast, or even within their particular territory.

*10.15 am*

You will find tourism enterprises flourishing where no other enterprise could sustain itself. When tourism is growing so too are employment, income, spending and taxes.

It stabilises the balance of payments like no other sector. Despite global economic conditions, tourism is still expanding. The World Travel and Tourism Council estimates that the total industry employed 231 million people last year, making it one of the biggest industries in the world. To get some idea of how tourism has impacted on the economic life of the island of Ireland, there are plenty of big numbers out there. First, it employs 280,000 people. Since Tourism Ireland took over responsibility for marketing the island of Ireland in 2002, we have brought in 48 million overseas tourists, who spent almost £16 billion or €24 billion while here. Since 2002, overseas-visitor numbers have risen by 31%. That figure outstrips European rivals' growth of 19% by a considerable distance.

Behind those figures lie some startling achievements. Who would have thought, 10 years ago, that Lonely Planet's blue guide would in 2006 list Northern Ireland as a must-see destination? As recently as four years ago, there was one international flight from Belfast City Airport. Today, more than 20 bring visitors to that region. Our promotional work in Northern Ireland has helped to maximise a range of positive factors — the peace dividend, inward investment, improved access and a more confident tourism sector generally. The industry has now recorded five successful years and is on track for a sixth. In the recent celebrations in Belfast for the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, there was an inescapable sense of arrival — that Northern Ireland's time had come. The

changed

political climate and the co-operation that has flowed from it have lifted a major barrier to economic development. Last year, for example, 250,000 spectators attended the Irish stage of the World Rally Championship, making it the largest sporting event ever hosted on the island. In total, the event delivered an economic dividend of about €48 million or £33 million to the north-west, a territory that has a number of disadvantages.

In Tourism Ireland, one of the key objectives is to deliver marketing programmes of

the highest international standard that will communicate the island of Ireland's brand values and core proposition. To that end, we have a lot going for us. Recent years have seen transformational improvements in the accommodation stock of the island. The infrastructure developments that are so vital in spreading economic gains to the regions are ongoing. On the product side, the calendar is chock-full of cultural events and festivals. Scarcely a town or village in the country does not celebrate its opera, oysters or art at least once per year.

Belfast is not the only city to have dramatic improvements in access. We have worked with airlines and airport authorities to promote additional, direct, convenient and competitive services. Since 2005, summer air access has increased by 22%, while winter access has increased by 29%. We have developed car-touring campaigns in Great Britain in conjunction with sea carriers, to grow sea access.

Perhaps most importantly, the feedback from our consumers is good. Research with

departing visitors shows that most holidaymakers have had a wonderful holiday here

and that the island of Ireland met or exceeded their expectations. While tourism may have a unique role in driving economic development, it also faces a range of challenges that few other sectors have to deal with. Our successes over the past six

years have come despite a variety of obstacles; health scares from foot and mouth,

avian flu and SARS, not to mention the ever-turbulent geopolitical situation. The runaway price of oil, together with the ongoing strength of the euro against sterling

for the South, and the dollar impacting on both North and South, certainly do not

do us any favours. While Irish tourism itself cannot relocate to China, tourists themselves can. Competitiveness is a huge issue.

Prices here are rising faster than anywhere else. Ireland has become perceived more

and more as a relatively expensive destination. While tourism has great potential to

spread economic development to the regions, we do not always realise that potential. The challenges that confront tourism enterprises go even deeper than

that. The consumer sitting at his or her computer screen is faced with vast amounts of competitively priced choice. To get his attention, we have to speak directly to the consumer. He is not looking for a holiday any more; he is looking for adventure, unusual environments and cultures, self-improvement and personalised travel experiences. It is also worth noting that people are becoming increasingly concerned about the environment, climate change and carbon emissions. Visitors in the future will be more likely to choose a destination that is environmentally friendly and offers sustainable tourism products.

Those are the challenges. That is the complex marketplace that we are faced with. To address it and to ensure the ongoing contribution of tourism to the economic life of the island, what do we have to do? We have to invest. Education and training will also need to see substantial outlay. People — I repeat, people — deliver the Irish holiday experience. If we do not put money into them, we will see our existing competitive position decline. While we have an adequate accommodation bed stock in the South, and while the position in Northern Ireland is improving, more accommodation is still required in Northern Ireland. We also have to work on giving the tourist something to do when he gets here. To that end, details were announced in February of a €100 million or £69 million investment programme under the national development plan in the South. The money is destined for the enhancement of existing tourist attractions and the development of new ones. Meanwhile, in the North, the recent launch of the latest tourism development scheme provides substantial government assistance to tourism capital projects.

What kind of things are we talking about here? To take one, the national development plan makes provision for an investment of €75 million for the improvement of the island's inland waterways. Waterways Ireland, a North/South body, will carry out a programme of activities, including the reopening of the Royal Canal to boating traffic. The Ulster Canal, from Upper Lough Erne to Clones, will also be restored by agreement with the Northern Ireland Executive. These developments, taken in conjunction with Fáilte Ireland's new cruising strategy, fit perfectly with the kind of marketing that we are engaged in.

We are trying to offer unique, custom-designed experiences to sightseers and cultureseekers. Despite the challenging external environment over the lifetime of our current corporate plan, which is 2008-10, we are still aiming high. We are seeking once again to grow tourism to the island of Ireland at a faster rate than any other European country, or any country in the world. To reach those goals, we need better and more competitive holiday experiences for visitors North and South, together with effective investment in marketing to exploit the

opportunities that are there.

This year, Tourism Ireland has set out four key priorities. We are building deeper relationships with the customer in our marketing activity, and we are increasing our spending on digital marketing, which will exceed a quarter of our entire marketing spend by 2010. We will also be implementing improved ways of measuring our effectiveness. One of our key tasks for the year ahead lies in looking again at our brand. A review of the brand carried out last year will culminate in the production of a new marketing campaign in time for next year. That review confirmed once again that people and place remain the primary differentiators over other destinations when it comes to visitors choosing Ireland as a holiday destination. We are the island of unique character and characters. Communicating that message is vital to driving tourism and ensuring the economic viability of all of our island in the years ahead.

Equally important for future success is broadening our horizons to look at the opportunities that new and developing markets, in addition to our traditional core markets, present. According to the world tourism market, the Asia/Pacific region will be one of the fastest growing outbound regions, expanding by 6.5 per cent on average over the next 15 years. Tourism Ireland has already undertaken significant groundwork in China and India, where we have carried out considerable trade and media activities, as well as setting up offices in Mumbai and Shanghai. This year, we are cranking up our marketing activities in Asia and, for the first time, we will market directly to the consumer. I am pleased to say that Tourism Ireland has a close working relationship with VisitBritain in those new and developing markets, and we are engaged in co-operative marketing activities, where a visit to the island of Ireland is often planned as part of a longer trip, taking in Britain or even Europe. Those activities include co-operation on trade and consumer promotions, business tourism and journalist and trade familiarisation trips.

The new and developing markets review, which was completed last year, highlighted the potential for increased tourism from Asia and the Middle East and has set significant targets for visitors from those markets by 2013. The review recognised that the achievement of those targets would depend on the provision of additional

marketing funding and the removal of barriers. I refer in particular here to the availability and cost of visas. Visitors from over 80 countries still require a visa to visit Ireland and the UK, which are not part of the Schengen Agreement. The cost of an Ireland or UK visa is significantly higher than a Schengen visa. The number and capacity of offices issuing Irish visas needs to keep pace with the growing demand for travel from those new developing markets.

It is currently more difficult and expensive to obtain longer-stay or multiple-entry visas. Tourists travelling around the island of Ireland require both a UK and an Ireland visa and a multiple-entry visa as they move between jurisdictions more than once during their holiday. That makes it costly and complex under current negotiated conditions. More flexibility and longer-stay visas would reduce the pressures on visa offices and encourage repeat visits.

As you can see, there is considerable progress to be made if we are to be in a position to capitalise fully on these business opportunities. I believe that we have exciting and challenging times ahead and that the prospects for tourism look bright on the island of Ireland. As a small, open island economy, we have no control over external challenges, such as oil prices, currency fluctuations and socio-political uncertainty. Within our own sphere of influence, we have control over our product — our service — and ensuring that we provide value for money. Those global changes present a real challenge but we should be encouraged that, despite everything, we continue to punch above our weight.

We have made huge progress in a relatively short time, building of course on the solid foundation created by decades of success, particularly in the South. I am delighted to say that we are now seeing the benefits of the peace dividend in Northern Ireland, where the tourism industry is going from strength to strength and has every appearance of a much brighter future.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you again for the opportunity of telling you about Tourism Ireland and the work we do. I hope you have a fruitful and enjoyable meeting here in Wexford. As chairman of Tourism Ireland, it would be remiss of me if I did not remind you that the island of Ireland is a great place for a holiday or a short break, and we look forward to welcoming you back soon again.

*10.30 am*

**The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Peter Hain MP):** Hugh, thank you very much for that commendable address. Tourism Ireland and Rally Ireland, whose success you mentioned, have been two of the biggest successes of North/South co-operation. They have had a practical outcome, whereas some of the other political North/South bodies — they are of course necessary and important — have

talked, but those two have really acted. You have done an outstanding job, along with Paul. I have had indications from Cecilia Keaveney and Jimmy Gordon that they want to ask questions. Cecilia first, please.

**Senator Cecilia Keaveney:** Thank you, Co-Chairman. I want to congratulate you on the work that you did in relation to the north-west rally; I know that you had a great interest in ensuring that it happened, and it had a great impact in the area for tourism.

I want to address a couple of questions to another fellow Donegal man. Some of those here are complaining that all the most important people here are Donegal people but, if that is what they think, fair enough.

The car ferry across the Foyle led in three years to a million passengers using it, and was a huge, tangible access improvement, but also one of the greatest buildings of bridges without a bridge being there — I do not know how I should put it — between North and further north in my area. What role do you think that the absence of a direct train service from Dublin to Derry plays in keeping visitor numbers into the north-west lower than they would be to other places that are accessible by train? How do you feel about the fact that, while investment is going into the roads, there does not seem to be potential for the train to be direct until 2011? Are you happy with the priority given from a tourism point of view?

A similar second question is whether you think that the grant aids available are tailored to the real tourist needs. Ireland is not in the 40-degree weather bands at the best of times. We are an island nation and should maximise our marine activity, yet often when you ask the department of marine about marine development and grant aid for tourism, it says, "That's for tourism", and you go to the tourism department but it says, "That is for the department of marine".

The two questions are really on access to the north-west — are you happy with the lack of a train service until 2011? — and whether the grant aids are tailored to needs.

Finally, golf has been a huge development and a great link between all of the UK and Ireland. The potential for expanding that is huge.

**The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Peter Hain MP):** Cecilia, thanks very much. I have had a forest of hands go up, so I shall let the questions be asked and both Hugh and Paul

reply at end, if that is okay. If colleagues could keep their questions as precise and brief as possible, that will get everybody in.

**The Lord Gordon of Strathblane:** I join others in congratulating Mr Friel. I hope that tourism might be a subject that the Body will address in future, because it is par excellence something in which we have a joint vested interest.

I want to raise three brief points. First, it is not often realised that the UK is one of the few countries in Europe that charges the full rate of VAT on hotels. By contrast, the Republic of Ireland virtually halved its rate of VAT some years ago and saw a dramatic improvement in the Treasury take as a result.

My second point is to ask him to quantify, if he would, the improvement to Northern Ireland. Some years ago, when I was chairman of the Scottish Tourist Board, I chaired a conference in Glasgow with the subject “Peace through Tourism” — not the other way round, believe it or not — and David Trimble said that at that point Northern Ireland had a quarter of the income per head of Scotland, so the ambition of doubling its tourism take was not overambitious. I wonder what progress has been made, given the peace process.

The third point echoes Mr Friel’s remarks on the importance of accessibility. There have been various attempts at a link between, eg, Ballycastle and Campbeltown. However much we may think that our respective countries are the destination of choice for the entire world, we are pinpricks on the edge of Europe to the traveller from China. If we can get a better link between Scotland and Ireland, it will improve tourism to both countries.

**The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Peter Hain MP):** And Wales, Jimmy.

**Mr Willie Clarke MLA:** Go raibh maith agat, Co-Chairman. What progress has Tourism Ireland made in promoting political tourism? One just has to look at the tourism product of Wexford and its rich history of the United Irishmen and 1798. The same potential exists, though in a modern-day context, in the North. A number of political initiatives are based around tourism throughout the North — in the Bogside, the Falls, South Armagh and the Shankill — but they need to be promoted in a holistic fashion on the world stage.

**The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Peter Hain MP):** Chris Ruane is next, followed by Martin Mansergh, Alf Dubs, Seymour Crawford, Alex Atwood, Brian Adam and

Eddie McGrady. Have I missed anybody? I obviously have.

**Mr Chris Ruane MP:** I will follow on from the last question. If there is an attempt to promote political tourism, especially leading up to 2016 with the commemoration of the uprising, do not forget Frongoch, which was a prisoner of war camp for Irish prisoners in north Wales. In fact, my grandfather was stationed there.

I know that you said that you have no control over exchange rates, but my second point is to ask what impact the fluctuation or devaluation of the pound against the euro will have on tourism this year in Ireland. I presume that the British market is your biggest market. Are you targeting other countries if you predict that there will be a fall in the numbers coming over? Are you having promotion campaigns in other countries to attract visitors to get over the shortfall?

**Dr Martin Mansergh TD:** There is no doubt that Tourism Ireland has been a flagship of North/South co-operation. As Mr Friel pointed out, in a year when there are a lot of economic pressures and problems, tourism still appears to be growing, which is positive. From a North/South point of view and a Northern Ireland point of view — and although undertaken for strict commercial reasons — the Aer Lingus expansion into Belfast must have been positive, even if it caused some problems for those of us from Munster. However, it underlines the point made by Cecilia Keaveney, which is that the geographical distribution of access points is important. If things like the absence of the Swansea-Cork ferry at the moment could be replaced, that would undoubtedly boost south-west tourism. There is a problem in the sense that metropolitan tourism has grown enormously, putting pressure on some of the regions. You might comment on that.

Secondly, you put great emphasis on investment in tourism. This hotel is a prime example of investment in tourism. There was a very charming, much more traditional hotel here a few years ago, but it was obviously not big enough to cope with the demand. A few hundred metres from here in this town, major investment is taking place in a new opera house; in fact it is the first opera house to be built, as far as I am aware, in the strict sense of the term, since independence —

**The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Peter Hain MP):** Apologies, but this is time for questions —

**Dr Martin Mansergh TD:** Yes, I am just coming to a question. It will have substantially increased capacity. In contrast, I go to Castle Ward, which is a fine opera festival that has been kept very short of funds. It used to put on two productions, but it now really only puts on one plus some scenes. The point has been made to me that culture is kept on fairly short commons in Northern Ireland. Obviously, that has a tourist dimension to it, including a North/South tourism dimension. Can you comment on that?

**The Lord Dubs:** I congratulate the Co-Chairman on his new post and membership of this Body. I also congratulate Mr Friel. I have two questions. First, to what extent is the tourist infrastructure in Northern Ireland still inadequate to meet demand; in other words, hotels, restaurants and so on? I remember during the Balmoral agricultural show many years ago, when there were fewer hotels in Belfast, and it was absolutely impossible to get a single hotel room. I wonder whether he could comment on how adequate the situation is at the moment. My second question is slightly different. To what extent are the tourists who come to Northern Ireland people who make it as part of a visit to the whole of Ireland? In the old days they would go only to the Republic and they would not go North at all. To what extent is it now part of an all-Ireland tourist package, and to what extent do some tourists at least visit Northern Ireland specifically?

**Mr Seymour Crawford TD:** I follow on from that comment regarding the needs in Northern Ireland. I add to that comment the border region, specifically Cavan and Monaghan. Mr Friel mentioned the fact that there was scarcity of bed numbers in Northern Ireland. I would like to make him aware of the fact that there are significant bed numbers in those two border counties; with the Slieve Russell, the Cavan Crystal, the Hotel Kilmore, the Radisson, the Four Seasons in Monaghan, Castle Leslie, the Hillgrove, the Westenra, the Glencarne and the Nuremore.

Unfortunately, Tourism Ireland does not seem to recognise that region. I ask him to do so in the future, in conjunction with Northern Ireland. I suggest that with the involvement of Aer Lingus in Belfast International Airport and Ryanair in Belfast City Airport, there are major opportunities to bring much larger numbers in, not just to the six counties of Northern Ireland, but to the border counties. As he knows and as Cecilia Keaveney knows, Donegal is well looked after tourism-wise, but other areas are not. I ask him to do that. I welcome the potential that the opening of the Ulster Canal will give to the Clones/Monaghan/Cavan region. There is

urgency for work to be seen to start on the proposed Belfast to Derry route, so that at least if we do not have a railway we will have high-quality roads to serve that region.

**Mr Alex Atwood MLA:** Martin Mansergh was right to describe Tourism Ireland as the flagship of North/South work. A lot of learning can be applied from the Tourism Ireland model more generally on the island of Ireland. It is interesting that if there is anything that the Unionist parties are most comfortable with in respect of North/South, it appears to be tourism and Tourism Ireland, so there may be something there that this organisation might want to think about.

Two questions have been touched on. First, what is Tourism Ireland doing to have a dedicated approach to enable the North to catch up? For self-evident reasons, over many years the North lagged behind the rest of the island when it came to attracting visitors. Given that we now have year-on-year growth in the North in tourist numbers, what is Tourism Ireland doing in a dedicated way to ensure that the catch-up happens and happens quicker than might otherwise be the case?

Secondly, it makes a lot of sense to market Ireland internationally as one island, but does it make so much sense to market Ireland in Britain as one island? Will not tourists from Britain in many instances want to go to a particular region when they come to Ireland — Dublin, Belfast, Wexford, the north-west or wherever? What is Tourism Ireland doing to market Ireland in Britain on a regional basis, including the North of Ireland in particular? It seems to me that people in Britain have choices to make about where in particular they want to go for a weekend break or for a weeklong break.

*10.45 am*

**Mr Brian Adam MSP:** I recall that when Jimmy Gordon was the chairman of the Scottish Tourist Board, it made some choices about niche marketing. Following on from what Willie Clarke said about political or historical tourism, there is bound to be some significant interest in family-history tourism, which is one of the areas identified in Scotland. To what extent will this organisation target that market? What potential is there for not just North/South but east-west relations? VisitScotland

has a significant interest in doing that and is driving it up, and there may well be opportunities not only in terms of the tourism bodies but the records office. The General Register Office in Scotland is currently producing a family-history centre in Edinburgh in co-operation with the Lord Lyon Court and the National Archives of Scotland. Sharing access to records can help to drive up tourism in general, not just for individual parts of the islands but possibly back and forth, given the strong family connections and the things that happened in Ulster in terms of Presbyterian Scots.

**Mr Eddie McGrady MP:** I thank Mr Friel for his very interesting address. I have a question regarding the very important signature projects in the North of Ireland that require 50% funding from local government and the Rural Development Council. Does he agree that it is highly unlikely that those bodies would be able to produce the funding that is required for the implementation of those important projects? Therefore, would it be appropriate if a North/South tourism package was created whereby both Governments, given the all-Ireland dimension of the attractions of such projects, would provide additional funding? That would fit in well with a couple of existing things, such as the geopark designation for Cooley, Slieve Gullion and the Mourne and the gateway centre somewhere between Dundalk and Newry. There is a precedent for it. Could he indicate what progress could be made in providing the funding to enable the crucially fundamental centre-stage projects known as the signature projects to be implemented?

**The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Peter Hain MP):** Before I call Robert Walter as the next questioner, I have Noel Treacy, Martin Brady, Iain Smith, Rory O'Hanlon and Jim Sheridan. I propose to close it there, because we are going to run out of time. I will add Steve; the Isle of Man gets in.

**Mr Robert Walter MP:** I wanted to pick up on the point made in the presentation about visas for those visiting who require them. Although we have a common travel area, it is a legal requirement for people who want to visit all of the islands to have both a United Kingdom visitor's visa and a Republic of Ireland visitor's visa. Physically, if they cross the land border, there is no systematic immigration check to see whether they have a visa, and if they travel from Ireland into Great Britain, none of the British airports has any systematic checks on immigration, passports and

visas.

However, it does not work the other way around, as I have bored the Body with before, because at Dublin and Cork airports the common travel area does not exist

and people are asked for their passports. Does that create problems, with tourists

straying across the border without realising that they need two visas? Have there been any discussions between Tourism Ireland and the authorities on both sides of the border as to whether there could be a common visitor visa for the islands within the common travel area—a sort of mini-Schengen Agreement?

**Mr Noel Treacy TD:** I congratulate Mr Friel, Mr O'Toole and their colleagues in Tourism Ireland on the great work that they have done. Picking up on the last point

made, I agree that there is huge potential for the Body to be involved in tourism right across the islands. There is massive opportunity for us to work on achieving a

common travel area visa and putting the structures in position. It is a big and complex challenge, but it can be done to the mutual benefit of everybody. Can Mr Friel and Mr O'Toole give any indicative figures on or quantify the mobility of people from the North to the South and vice versa in the domestic tourism field since Tourism Ireland was established? I congratulate them on their excellent radio and TV ads particularly promoting Northern Ireland.

Mention has been made of political tourism. We have had Ballycastle, Ballinasloe and Killorglin for years, and politicians of all parties have been coming and going North and South to all those festivals to the mutual benefit of everybody. They have

kept a window of opportunity open when every other way was opaque. We salute

them for that and there is potential there. There is huge potential in the whole field of military tourism. There is the opportunity to create a Boyne-Aughrim-Athenry axis. Taking into account the European dimension — the huge amount of Europeans who lost their lives in those battles — there is an opportunity that we could expand very much to the benefit of everybody, not just in Ireland but right across the islands.

**Senator Martin Brady:** I want to refer to one aspect of tourism — fishing — that was always important to Ireland. Unfortunately, in recent years, the number of fishermen who come to Ireland has decreased enormously. The reason is that we have poaching, netting and illegal fishing, and the stocks are at their lowest ever. Not much is done about it because we do not have sufficient staffing in the Central Fisheries Board or the inland fisheries to patrol lakes and rivers. Unless we do something about that, that part of the industry will dribble away altogether. I ask Tourism Ireland to liaise with the Central Fisheries Board to do something about that.

My second question is in relation to proposals by Dublin City Council to introduce

bed tax. What impact will that have on tourism, if any?

**Mr Iain Smith MSP:** A lot has been said about investment in infrastructure, but investment in people is also important in the tourism industry, as it has tended to rely heavily on low-waged, part-time and, significantly, increasing numbers of migrant workers. How do we improve status and training in the tourism and hospitality industries to try to encourage people to see it as a career opportunity?

The second issue I want to touch on is about the impact of the weak dollar on tourism. I represent St Andrews, which relies a lot on golf tourism. A lot of those tourists come from America. Next year, Scotland is trying to promote an international year of homecoming, to encourage our diaspora to come and visit Scotland in the 250th anniversary of Burns. Both those things will be affected by the weakness of the dollar and high fuel costs. What impact are those having on tourism across the isles?

**Dr Rory O'Hanlon TD:** I have just two questions. First, would Mr Friel like to see any developments between Ireland and Britain that would increase the tourist capacity, particular in relation to the massive number — millions — who come to Britain from overseas and do not come on to visit Ireland? You referred to visas; can anything be done there in terms of access or cost? The other question relates to the fact that many parts of Ireland, both North and South, have no tradition of tourism. You referred to 48 million tourists in the last six years, but many areas probably did not see 1% of them. An area such as between Newgrange and Armagh — it takes in Louth, the whole of County Armagh itself and Monaghan — does not have a tradition of tourism, but there is a package of culture, heritage and outdoor leisure pursuits there. It would be a cross-border region. Has Tourism Ireland looked at the possibility of establishing such a region so that that part of Ireland could benefit from the tourism economy?

**Mr Jim Sheridan MP:** As someone whose constituency takes in Glasgow Airport, I am somewhat concerned that the number of people travelling through that airport is declining. There may be a number of reasons for that, but one of the main ones seems to be the recent terrorist attack and the security arrangements put in place not just at Glasgow Airport but at airports throughout the UK. Flying is now becoming a frustrating and angry business; it leads to long and frustrated queues. Is the island of Ireland experiencing the same problems and, if not, why not? My other question about tourism is whether some indication could be given of how Ireland is using the money that it gets from the European fund to promote tourism?

**Hon Stephen Charles Rodan MHK:** The Isle of Man used to enjoy a long tradition of holidaymakers from Ireland. With the discovery of Spain and foreign travel, like other cold-water resorts given the decline of that traditional market, it has to reinvent its approach to niche markets such as—as has been referred to — cultural tourism, short breaks and so on. What strategy has Ireland or its cold-water resorts similarly adopted to keep visitors from taking their spending potential to Spain or other places, and to keep the home visitors holidaying in Ireland?

My second comment relates to the extent to which your strategy is geared up to marketing Ireland in the context of a British Isles destination for international travellers from much further afield. I reiterate the support for that notion that has been expressed.

**The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Peter Hain MP):** I think that Niall Blaney has a constituency point.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** My question is around access for UK tourists to the north-west. Do either of you feel that City of Derry Airport has the capacity to deliver the wider north-west tourism potential?

With that in mind, do you feel that a ferry service to some part of the UK would be an advantage in developing tourism to its greater potential in the north-west?

**The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Peter Hain MP):** Thanks very much everyone. Now I will ask Hugh Friel and Paul O'Toole to divvy it up between them, if they wish to, and respond. There is only a limited time to do so, but there has been enormous interest, and we will be very grateful if you will respond now.

*11.00 am*

**Mr Hugh Friel:** Thank you for the questions, which are very real. Obviously, everyone has a very close connection, in some shape or form, with tourism, and it is also clear that people have experience and up-to-date knowledge. Access is critical; for all the islands, access to Ireland is critical. Access to a particular region is critical. That is one of the things that we are constantly working at, with ferry companies and airlines. No matter where you are, access is key. Huge progress has been made in terms of cheap access in the past 15 or 20 years, compared to the fares that one would have paid previously.

I will ask Paul to deal with the specific questions. Because he may not say it himself, I will say that Paul has put in a superhuman effort in relation to helping Northern

Ireland to catch up. Northern Ireland is considerably behind, for obvious reasons. We all know that. From my examination of what has gone on over the past five years — I have been in position since 1 January — it is clear to me that a huge effort in working with all the bodies up there has been put in by Paul and by his executive. That is critical. When I attended the celebration dinner in Belfast for the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, I got vibes there that were seriously interesting. They talked about professionalism and having done a very good job. People are looking at this not in a political way, but purely commercially. The commercial success of Tourism Ireland up to now has been huge, and full credit to the team involved in bringing the total island along.

Dr Mansergh talked about the infrastructure in the North. We all know that there is a big catch-up to be done on the infrastructure. A lot of progress has been made in Belfast, which is getting the bulk of the investment. There are probably five new topquality hotels coming on-stream. Out in the regions, it is much, much slower. The North of Ireland has not had the same number of incentives as we have had in the South. That is an issue. We have got seriously involved in many of the issues that have been raised in relation to taxation, rates of VAT and grant aid. We are trying to make progress in terms of political lobbying or through the North/South Ministerial Council. Paul, could you pick up on as many of the important points that have been raised as possible?

**Mr Paul O'Toole:** Many of the questions raised by Members relate to competitiveness and competitive advantage and how both parts of this island can secure it. There is relevance in all the questions to doing that. In any competitive situation, there are going to be external things and internal things — the things that we can fix ourselves. I will attempt to deal with the questions as specifically as I can.

In terms of internal transport and the challenges for the north-west, it has long been recognised that the north-west is the most peripheral region in the island of Ireland. Access and ease of getting to a place is critical to developing tourism business.

Any

possible developments there will be welcome. The island of Ireland is just that; an island. You can either sail here or fly here. Those are the choices. When they get here, people need to be able to move around easily. That is fundamental to the tourism industry. In terms of the provisions for grant aid, there are quite a number of schemes. We do not operate them, but I know that they can potentially be confusing. Our colleagues in Fáilte Ireland recently launched a new scheme that is very clear in giving details and should be helpful to tourism enterprises in developing their businesses.

In terms of the rate of VAT in the UK versus the South, undoubtedly the lower the tax burden that can be placed on the tourism industry, generally speaking, the more competitive it can be in international marketplaces. The true test is what is happening elsewhere. Many of the countries with which we compete have lower direct taxation, which helps them to have competitive advantage. To quantify the improvements in Northern Ireland, our base figure before we arrived was 1.3 million visitors who came to Northern Ireland, and last year it was in the region of 1.8 million visitors. More specifically within that, there has been a substantial improvement in business from mainland Europe and North America, with the holidaymaker portion of that — people coming to Northern Ireland on holidays — also improving significantly.

Political tourism, when it is done well, undoubtedly adds to the story and to the experience for visitors. There is a debate in Northern Ireland about how to take that forward, and we are contributing to that through both traditions and through both communities. The important thing is that when the story is told, it is told in a balanced way that the overseas visitor can come to, experience, enjoy and learn from. That is the challenge. Progress is being made in relation to that, and from a marketing perspective we will contribute to that discussion.

The fluctuation of currencies came up a couple of times. For visitors from Great Britain visiting euroland, it is comparatively more expensive in 2008, and that is going to have some impact. It is not a problem for the Republic of Ireland; it is a problem for anyone in euroland. Conversely for Northern Ireland, the sterling relationship remains the same, so there will be a clear transparency in costs, and we hope that will work to Northern Ireland's advantage this year.

On access, there is the expansion of Aer Lingus into Belfast and the Swansea-Cork ferry. Access links and investment are fundamental to developing an island's tourism business. There have been great strides; we were never served with more airlines visiting more regional airports and the main airports. The ferry services are

strong,  
particularly from GB into Ireland. We are not in a bad place, but it is something  
that  
we can never be complacent about. Events such as the Wexford opera festival  
offer a great opportunity for investing. The visitor wants to experience things  
and needs  
things to see and do. We always welcome new ideas and innovation in that and  
we  
are looking to see how we can promote that from an overseas perspective.

On the tourism infrastructure in Northern Ireland and how ready it is to meet the  
demands of potential tourism in the future, the accommodation bank in Northern  
Ireland has improved, particularly in Belfast and somewhat in Derry, but to a  
more  
limited extent outside those two cities. To fully tap into the potential for overseas  
tourism, we need more good-quality accommodation—not just hotels — right  
across  
Northern Ireland. We welcome investments and anything that can be done to  
move  
that along.

The cross-border aspect and the idea of an all-island package came through in a  
number of areas. The border counties are very important to tourism and they  
offer  
potential. I think that we would accept that that potential has not been fully  
realised to date. There are quite a number of specific funds available from the EU,  
and we are  
doing promotional work with colleagues in Fáilte Ireland, the Northern Ireland  
Tourist Board and the respective regional organisations. Quite a lot of  
promotional  
activity is going on, and we would like to take that forward. There was a  
suggestion  
that we perhaps forget about Cavan and Monaghan; not at all. They are very  
beautiful and important counties which have a wonderful product. Given the  
dearth of accommodation just across the border, those businesses would tell you  
that they are picking up visitors and are now serving Northern Ireland right  
along those border  
counties.

There was a question about what sort of dedicated approach Tourism Ireland  
has to  
catching up in Northern Ireland. That is a fundamental part of what we do. In the  
context of the island of Ireland, we have sought to bring out the attractions of  
Northern Ireland, to make people aware of what is there, what is beautiful, what  
is  
unique and what is wonderful for a visitor to come and see.

Every line of our promotion, across every element of our marketing  
communications

campaigns, does that. More specifically, we have been investing in bringing overseas travel journalists to Northern Ireland to come and experience it for themselves. We have wonderful success in that, working again with colleagues in the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the industry in Northern Ireland.

Specifically, we are running campaigns in Great Britain, particularly northern England and Scotland, which are Northern Ireland-dedicated. That came about when we met the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee in Westminster last year; it was one of its recommendations, which we have taken forward, again with our colleagues in the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

There was a question about whether it made sense to promote the island of Ireland in Great Britain. It is topical and has been addressed on a number of occasions. Given the resource that we have and the extent and importance of the Great Britain market, the more we can co-operate in promotion, we should do. First, we have to offer the visitor from Great Britain the opportunity to come to the island of Ireland; subsequently or in parallel, we have to tell them about what there is for them to do in Northern Ireland and in other parts. We are engaged in that and believe that we are successful in doing so. I am getting a hint to move on.

Genealogy is a product that we engage in and in respect of which we have a number of initiatives overseas. We have not really explored the opportunity of doing that with Scotland, but I will take that idea forward with colleagues. Signature projects are a fundamental part of the tourism framework for action in Northern Ireland developed by our colleagues in the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. They require significant funding, some of which is in place. There are some opportunities and challenges on those projects, but some new EU funds are coming through and we will strongly support the projects' completion. There will be winning opportunities for us in overseas markets as we move forward.

Visas are a challenge that we are taking up with the respective departments. We have had initial discussions with both our sponsoring departments and would like that debate to continue. We need to make it both competitive and easy for visitors to come and visit both parts of the island. Whether that can be done through a common travel area is one opportunity to explore. I shall deal with the mobility of visitors on the island. When we started, one thing that struck us was the relatively small number of visitors who travelled to both its parts. It has been the fastest-increasing segment of our overall business, but there is still a lot more to go.

There have been some opportunities in product development on military tourism that could usefully be explored. The idea that angling has been

somewhat in decline, and that that is related to product issues, is absolutely correct. Ireland was known for its angling and there has been a fightback in recent years to get the product right, but the market has also changed for that type of business. The number of people who specifically travel for angling is in decline generally, including somewhat from our main market in that respect — Great Britain. However, a lot of work is going on with colleagues in the Central Fisheries Board to try to address that through product development and better promotion.

We are a people industry, so we need to invest in people — not just in basic training, but explaining how and helping them to give the welcome to our overseas visitors that is fundamental to what we are about.

I was asked about developments in how Ireland can take a share of business from people from further parts who come to Great Britain, and who may take an opportunity to come to Ireland. The further away you get from this island, the more important that becomes. We have a range of co-operative ventures with our colleagues in VisitBritain to tap into exactly that market, and there is potential for that.

In terms of frustration for people travelling, undoubtedly aviation is a more difficult experience because of defence and security issues that we all have to encounter. The consumer is getting used to that. Despite those difficulties, we still see the ambitions and the desire to travel by air. It is so fundamental to our business that we hope that it will not get more difficult. We should not take the eye off the ball. People need to feel welcome. They understand the need for security, but they also need to be able to move in a way that does not frustrate or undermine them.

Niche marketing was raised by the gentleman from the Isle of Man. Ireland has had to do it as well. Most of the seaside resorts here have had to reinvent themselves through product development, looking through different ranges of products and events that they have put in place. Some are doing it more successfully than others, but the fundamental point is that the consumer has moved on, so we have to move on. The point came through about strategy for the British Isles; again, I refer to our relationship with VisitBritain and what we are trying to do on that.

City of Derry Airport is already making a significant contribution to developing links and making it easier for people to access the north-west generally. There has been an upsurge in new routes into Belfast City and Belfast International airports that are also benefiting the north-west. City of Derry Airport needs continued investment, but it faces the challenges of many smaller regional airports in trying

to be sustainable and keep the routes going. We certainly welcome it—we have used the airport ourselves. We think that it is useful and could make an upscaleable contribution to tourism in the north-west.

*11.15 am*

**The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Peter Hain MP):** Paul, thanks very much for dealing with that so comprehensively. We should all give you and Hugh Friel a round of applause for the fantastic job that you are doing.

I have a couple of announcements. First, the coach taking my colleagues back to vote in London will leave at 1.15 pm, and there will be a quick lunch at 12.45 pm, so if you want to grab a bite to eat, you need to nip in pretty sharply. There is now what is described as a family photograph in the courtyard, and we need to be back in here at 11.30 am, because I do not want to keep Pat Carey, the Minister of State, waiting, so I am afraid that we will need to sprint for that photograph.

*The sitting was suspended at 11.16 am and resumed at 11.43 am.*

### **THE DRUGS PROBLEM, ITS EFFECTS AND IMPACT ON OUR COMMUNITIES**

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** Given the workings of the British-Irish Council in recent days, the time is right to discuss the drugs problem, and its effects and impact on our communities. I am delighted to welcome my predecessor as the Irish Co-Chairman, the Minister of State with responsibility for drugs, Pat Carey TD. We are also joined by Superintendent Barry O'Brien, head of the national drugs team.

**The Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Deputy Pat Carey):** It is a pleasure to be here. I recognise some of the older faces, and it is great to see some new faces, too.

As the Co-Chairman has said, I want to discuss in broad terms the drugs strategy in Ireland and touch on engagement through the British-Irish Council. Barry O'Brien is not only head of the national drugs unit but chair of the national drugs strategy team, which is a co-ordinating body of state agencies and community and voluntary representatives that reports to my Department.

Drug misuse is a huge problem across all our jurisdictions and beyond. Its negative effects and impacts on communities are all too apparent. Drugs misuse has been given significant prominence at British-Irish Council level in recent years. The British-Irish summit meeting in Dublin in February featured a thematic discussion on “Families and Drug Misuse: Challenges and Opportunities”. The heads of administration discussed, among other things, the need to provide advice and support to families, the importance of supporting families through treatment and rehabilitation processes, reducing the harm caused to children by parental drug use and harnessing the potential of families to facilitate the rehabilitation of their drug-using family member. By sharing our experiences, we can hopefully move towards developing better social policies within our respective Administrations with the aim of providing more targeted family support with knock-on benefits for our communities.

At British-Irish Council level, Ireland takes the lead role on the sectoral group on the misuse of drugs. This group is very active, and I look forward to chairing the ministerial meeting on drugs towards the end of this year. At official level, the British-Irish sectoral group on drugs meets about four times every year. During 2007, meetings focused on homelessness, which was led by Scotland, on drugs strategy development, which was led by England, enhanced information systems around drugs and alcohol, which was led by the Isle of Man, and substance misuse assessment tools, which was led by Wales. We also discussed preparations for the pre-summit meeting in Ireland. Apart from the summit that has already been held, this year’s programme will include a meeting on risk and protection factors in Northern Ireland in June, and further meetings after the summer, culminating, as I have said, in a ministerial event later in the year.

The Council provides an opportunity for our respective officials to build contacts and networks, which can be beneficial. The drugs problem is a global one, so it is little wonder that our jurisdictions can learn from each other by sharing experiences and best practice. I want to mention one specific instance of co-operation that has emerged from the British-Irish Council work on drugs. Prompted by Guernsey, the drugs misuse sectoral group organised a meeting involving law enforcement and financial regulation personnel in the island last September. This meeting focused on asset confiscation, and there was a significant input by representatives of the Criminal Assets Bureau in Ireland, who have been very successful in seizing a large number of assets from the proceeds of drug dealing in Ireland.

That meeting concluded that there has been close co-operation on enforcement between our Administrations, with good networking already in place. Indeed, it was

acknowledged that increased seizures in jurisdictions have been attributed in part to a successful intelligence-led approach both at national and at international level. The meeting also reflected on developments at Interpol level to facilitate deeper transnational working in future. The outcome of this meeting was the setting up of a confiscation group on an informal basis outside the big structures, and it is envisaged that meetings will take place on an annual basis. That is an interesting example of how formal BIC structures can lead to deeper co-operation on more detailed policy areas.

Turning to today's specific topic, there is no doubt that drugs have a negative impact on communities across all our jurisdictions, often with particularly pronounced problems in areas of social disadvantage. In my visits to projects and events at local and regional level in Ireland, concerns are regularly raised about antisocial behaviour, drug-related crime and violence, binge drinking and changing patterns of drug use, which may require changes in the approach adopted by those dealing with problem drug use.

My Department commissioned some research from our national advisory committee on drugs in 2006 on the impact of problem drug use in local communities. The resultant report, "A Community Drugs Study: Developing Community Indicators for Problem Drug Use" showed that, despite many locally based initiatives, communities are still being significantly affected by drugs. The study focused on three communities, Ballymun, Crumlin and Bray, all of which are in the Greater Dublin area. The problems identified included poly-drug use, which makes a solution more complex to achieve; alcohol misuse and underage drinking leading to public nuisance and disturbance and exacerbating the problems caused by illicit drugs; drug dealing associated with violence and intimidation; frustration about lack of access to suitable treatment for some; dissatisfaction with policing services; and drug-related debts.

At the same time, the report also found that some improvements have been achieved within those communities in the areas of school-leaving age, reduction in crime, expansion of drug treatment services and employment. It also reported that the more services access local knowledge in order to tackle issues on the ground, the greater the likelihood of success. The main recommendation of the

report is the need to place more emphasis on community indicators, which allow the identification of problems at an earlier stage facilitating earlier reactions to deal with them and feeding into policy formation at a broader level.

As well as matters such as crime and school absenteeism, the report envisaged that community indicators should cover issues such as engagement of service providers with the community and the levels of volunteerism and community participation pertaining in that community. Apart from the appalling consequences for the people directly involved, drug use clearly causes social and economic harm to families, friends, communities and society as a whole. Despite the best efforts of many, some communities are experiencing antisocial behaviour, intimidation and violence, which are linked to the criminal activity associated with the supply and use of drugs. Furthermore, great economic loss to the country is involved through the waste of the potential input that many people caught up in drugs could have made to society and to the costs that arise through involvement in drugs, particularly in the areas of healthcare and the criminal justice system.

Meanwhile, the drugs situation in Ireland and elsewhere constantly evolves, and we have seen increased use of cocaine in recent times. Cocaine is being used across all social strata and with an increasing geographic spread. Unfortunately, it is very often treated benignly or, indeed, glamorised by media coverage. As we know, cocaine is not benign. It involves really high risks to users that are often underestimated, sometimes with fatal consequences. On top of the risks that we all know about — strokes, nasal problems and mental-health issues such as depression and paranoia — are risks that are financial, social and dependency related. Related to these is the increasing threat of crime and violence. Such crime and violence is visited on communities that bear the brunt of the behaviour and criminal activity associated with the supply and use of a stimulant such as cocaine. Furthermore, cocaine is particularly dangerous when combined with alcohol and other substances. We hear in Ireland of a great propensity to mix cocaine with several other substances.

With regard to alcohol, I have been considering whether it would be beneficial to include it in an overall substance strategy in the context of our work on the development of the next phase of our national drugs strategy. Alcohol is the most prevalent drug in Ireland and, for all its benefits, it leads to much antisocial behaviour, domestic violence, ill health and economic problems for users, those around them and society generally. It is also a gateway to illicit drugs for many.

Combining policies and broadening the substances covered generally throws up a number of problems that would have to be considered further.

In the meantime, I note that your Administrations differ in their approaches to substance abuse, some having combined drugs and alcohol policies, while others approach the issues separately, though with synergies between the approaches. I am

encouraging my own officials to continue to explore this issue through their exchanges at the British-Irish Council to better inform our final decision on this important matter. As I have mentioned, we are developing a new national drugs strategy for the period 2009 to 2016. I am placing great emphasis on engagement with all sectors of society in an effort to come up with the optimum strategy. We have embarked on the consultation process, which includes open public consultation, meetings at 15 locations around the country, as well as meetings with the relevant departments and agencies and with key sector groups and focus groups, such as drug users, young people, the travelling community and immigrants. In that context, communities have ample opportunity to input to policy formation in an area that impacts so much on them. Again, the BIC experience is an aid to us in our work on developing a new strategy through the familiarity of my officials with the approach in all our Administrations, and through the meeting in England last year, which specifically focused on drugs-strategy development.

The issue of drugs use is complex and difficult. It is a global issue and no country has succeeded in tackling all aspects of the problem. However, through working together, the prospect of our efforts to combat the drugs problem being successful are increased, with the potential to lessen significantly the negative impacts suffered by communities. I will be pleased to answer any questions that arise from my discussion and that of Superintendent O'Brien. Thank you very much.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** Thank you very much, Pat. No doubt your task is enormous. May I ask Superintendent O'Brien to give his PowerPoint presentation?

**Detective Superintendent Barry O'Brien:** Good afternoon. My name is Barry O'Brien. I am a detective superintendent based in the national drugs unit in Dublin.

I find it somewhat intimidating to look at so many household names in the political sphere on both sides of the water. I feel very honoured to speak to you today about an issue that is close to all our hearts — the drugs issue.

In relation to what has already been outlined, I want to talk a little bit about the drugs situation and developments, the issues for society and communities, and some of the responses we undertake within the Police Service. This has

happened over a period of time and there has been a gradual progression, so it is sometimes useful to take a Stepp back and take a look at where we were a number of years ago. I want to talk specifically in relation to my experiences as a police officer. I have taken the period from 1980 onwards because this coincides with my own service as a police officer, and I have considered how the drugs situation has changed over that time.

If I were a businessman, how would I look at drugs from a business perspective? Back in 1982, when I joined the Garda Síochána, we were at the start of the first wave of the heroin epidemic that hit Ireland. That manifested itself in a rapid increase in crime, particularly in the mid-1980s. I was involved a street-crime unit that was involved predominantly in arresting drug users and bringing them before the courts. Heroin was the main issue. You would get quite a bit of cannabis but not that much. In your day-to-day work, you might get five or six seizures in any given year.

That changed dramatically in the 1990s and early 2000s. The national advisory committee on drugs looked at the prevalence of drug usage in society from an all-Ireland perspective, and its findings were quite remarkable. It discovered that one in four adults aged 15 to 64 had tried an illicit drug at some point in their lifetime. That survey was undertaken between 2006 and 2007. When you broke it down to look at the younger age group — those aged 15 to 34 — the figure increased to one in three. In terms of recent usage — that within the previous 12 months — one in 13 adults aged 15 to 64 had tried an illegal drug, and the figure is one in eight when you take the younger age group, 15 to 34. For current drug usage — that within the past month — it is one in 30 for 15 to 64-year-olds and one in 20 for the 15 to 34 age group. That survey covered Ireland — a survey in the United Kingdom would reveal a similar pattern — and it showed that a substantial minority of people have either tried drugs at some point in their lives or have tried them on a frequent basis.

An example from our own organisation is that in the early 1980s there would probably have been upwards of 1,200 drug offences. In 2002, there were about 8,300. Last year, the figure was around 12,800 for Ireland, recorded by the Garda Síochána. Another example is that in 2000, we seized about €20 million of illegal drugs. In 2007, that figure is about €50 million, which does not even take into account the seizure of 1.5 tonnes of cocaine off the south-west coast of Cork, which has a value of about €105 million. That tells us that there is a substantial usage of drugs in both all of Ireland and the United Kingdom.

The other thing I want to talk is product range. Back in the 1980s, there would have been things like amphetamines, but they would have been very moderate. You

would have had issues with, say, heroin and cannabis. You would have seen very little cocaine — there might be small, moderate amounts. However, look at the product range today. Look at the amphetamine-type stimulants, the range of opiates, even over-the-counter medicines, cannabis — either herb or resin — but also, as the Minister said, tobacco and alcohol, which can be gateways to further substance use.

The other area of interest is branding. If I were in a market, I would ask myself, how do I brand my product and is my brand easily recognisable? For example, if I mention the word “cannabis” to most adults on both sides of this jurisdiction, they know exactly what I am talking about, which is actually a very powerful brand. If you go into, or walk past some of the head stores in operation in both jurisdictions, you will see cannabis being branded. Most people even know the cannabis leaf to look at. Another example is the word “coke”. Some people might think of Coca-Cola, but quite a lot would think of the illicit variety. Similarly, when you talk of “speed”, it may not mean you are travelling at speed, but the illegal drug. Ecstasy is a feeling we all enjoy if we can, but most people will think of the drug. The branding of drugs is very strong in society, and it is important in terms of perpetuating drugs in the future.

One area we looked at was organisations. In the 1980s, drug trafficking organisations both in Ireland and in the United Kingdom would, with a few exceptions, have been very much locally based. Local criminals would be involved in accessing drugs from outside the jurisdiction. Now, our experience and that of the United Kingdom is that individuals involved in the trafficking of drugs have become global drug traffickers. The organisations themselves have developed the capacity to trade on a global scale, and sometimes we gloss over that point. However, it is a substantial matter if an organisation can trade globally.

Another issue is sophistication. A lot of the organisations are involved in the subdivision of activities. Some will be involved in the logistics of drugs; some will be involved in financing; some will be involved in housing the commodity; some will be involved in processing; and others will be involved in distribution and then returning the cashflow. Finances and communications also support these organisations. As

organisations, they have become far more sophisticated.

Another interesting thing relates to the dynamics of drugs trafficking organisations. I often say that it is the dynamics of drug trafficking that causes individuals and groups to organise. It is not that Barry O'Brien, for example, would set out to be the best drug trafficker and drug dealer in his locality; it is the dynamics of the trade that lead to the survival of the fittest. Those dynamics cause individuals and groups to organise on sophisticated lines.

Another element is consistency of supply, which manifests itself in drug pricing. There is a consistency in the supply of drugs to our society. There is also the issue of the conversion of product to cash. Drug trafficking groups are also quite confident that what they have is as good as cash — it is readily convertible. Profit margins are significant for individuals and groups at each stage of the process.

The most interesting recent development is the ability to deal in drugs on credit. You need a fairly sophisticated system in order to deal in drugs on credit. First, you have to be confident that consumers can, at the end of the day, pay, but also you have to be confident that you can get your cash back. With cocaine, in particular, there has been a phenomenal increase in the availability and use of cocaine on credit. That has caused a lot of problems for individuals, communities and society, particularly in relation to drug-related death, which is the experience of a lot of families and communities.

I have thought about how we, as a police force, respond to that — at this point, I am conscious of the audience. On a bilateral level, we in the Garda national drugs unit formally meet our colleagues in the Police Service of Northern Ireland every quarter. That is a very structured meeting with an agenda, in which we look at targets with a cross-border dimension that we jointly identify.

Similarly, operationally, we have almost daily contact with our colleagues in Northern Ireland about ongoing operations. In any given year, we have upwards of 10 joint cross-border operations. For example, last year, we had a very successful operation that seized €500,000 of herbal cannabis in the north-west of Ireland. Similarly, we had a substantial seizure of heroin just before Christmas, again as

the  
result of a joint cross-border operation.

We also have secondments. At any given time, police officers from the Garda national drugs unit are seconded to the PSNI and, similarly, colleagues from the PSNI are seconded to our unit. This allows us to learn collectively about the best approaches.

We have very close links with SOCA in the United Kingdom. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the United Kingdom, which has an outstanding liaison officer based in Dublin who has done considerable work on drugs investigations with us. We have had quite a number of operations with the United Kingdom — one recent operation saw the seizure of illegal drugs worth millions of euros, and quite a number of individuals from both sides of the border were arrested. We continue to meet about individual cases or at the outset of investigations.

What is important is how we deal with that at a local level. The drugs issue, like politics, is local. I know many of you represent constituencies that have had experience of substance misuse over a protracted period. The reality is that, although drugs are a problem for society, they have a different impact on different communities or groups in society. Police have to respond locally. When people hear about a major seizure, they may think that that is great, but the reality is that what happens locally is what is important. In the Garda national drugs unit, we regularly work with all the local drugs units. We have had a number of major operations that deal with the supply and distribution of drugs at a local level. That process is ongoing and leads to quite a number of successful convictions.

On dealing with the sophistication of drugs, most of our work is intelligence-based, including detailed profiles of individuals, intelligence gathering and fairly substantial footwork into the activities of individuals. When commodity moves, we are then in a position to have a greater insight into the organisation. We also use technology in both gathering intelligence and surveillance. We do not just focus on the product; we also focus on the logistics, distribution and cash. In our unit we have an investigation unit that deals specifically with issues of cash and cash conversion.

**Mr Charlie O'Connor TD:** I am comfortable contributing before the superintendent, because I am not a household name.

I welcome the superintendent and the Minister of State. Co-Chairman, I am sure that you will join me in wishing the Minister of State well as he sits by his phone over the next week waiting for the formation of the new Government. Pat Carey has done a tremendous amount of work in government on the drugs issue. For those of you who do not know me, which is most of the people in the room, I live in a place called Tallaght, which is 90 miles from here and which is the third largest population centre in the country. As the superintendent knows, we have faced challenges. It is interesting that both the Minister and the Garda are here this morning. There is clearly a policing issue to be tackled so far as drugs are concerned, but the Government are responsible for not only policing, but dealing with the consequences. Where communities have been affected and damaged, there should be a positive Government response. Many people think that the proceeds of drugs seized by the Government should be spent on all areas, and not just the Dublin area.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** I ask all Members to stick to questions. The English Members of Parliament must depart at lunchtime, so we are trying to finish by quarter past one.

**Mr Charlie O'Connor TD:** I facilitated that this morning by not saying a word, but I am particularly interested in this subject. My question is what networking has taken place not only with the authorities in the north, but in all the islands represented here in this body, because a lot has been gained in that regard.

I also want to wish Peter Hain well, because I am a big fan.

**Mr Chris Ruane MP:** Do you judge asset recovery in the South to be a success? If so, what was the key to that success, and is such success transferable to the UK? In other words, do you have any tips for us in the UK? I think that Charlie O'Connor is right, and I want to know whether the money raised by asset recovery is used in the areas where it was originally raised by drug barons, and is that money used on antidrug campaigns and treatments?

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** We will stack a number of questions before asking the panel to reply.

**Mr Paul Flynn MP:** Do other speakers agree that politicians in both our countries are in denial about the catastrophic and abject failure of our drug policies? The UK has signed up to two 10-year strategies, both of which started in 1998. The UK strategy aimed to cut heroin deaths by 50%. In fact, the number of heroin deaths is greater now than it was in 1998. We also signed up to the UN strategy, which aimed in 10 years for the total elimination of, or a substantial reduction in, all drug use and cultivation. Of course, not only has that absurd ambition not been met, but things have got worse.

Britain has spent £250 million and lost 95 lives in an attempt to reduce heroin crops in Afghanistan, which are the highest that they have ever been. The amount of heroin on the streets of London is the greatest that it has ever been, and the price is the lowest that it has ever been. Is it not about time that we, as politicians, faced up to the fact that we frame our policies for our own gratification and do not engage with the policies that work? In Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Australia and Portugal, they have had substantial reductions in all drug harm — drug deaths and drug crime. In Portugal, they depenalised all drugs in 2001, since when the number of drug deaths have halved.

Why do we not get behind the two most encouraging drug policies in Europe at the moment? One is the Red Cross and Red Crescent Rome declaration, which is supported by 130 countries, and the other is the new Council of Europe convention on drugs. Those two policies seek to do the same thing, namely to move the emphasis away from the criminal justice system and away from the failed policies of harsh prohibition that have not worked, and on to policies of harm reduction using health outcomes that work. When can our countries move to replicate the policies of the successful countries that have achieved those results, rather than going on repeating our catastrophic errors?

**Senator John Ellis:** I have one or two questions. The first is to Minister Carey. Does he feel that education is probably more important? We should get young people out there to explain the dangers of drugs, rather than their having the experience first and going back and explaining later. I believe that education is the place where you have to start when it comes to drugs.

Another issue is glamorisation. Regularly in the media we see unfortunate people who die as a result of drug overdoses and they are glamorised in death. I feel that

it

annoys us all that glamour is attached to the idea of lines of cocaine at the weekend

mixed with a cocktail of drugs — and we all know the net result of that. The glamorisation of drugs probably causes as many people to try and be abusers as anything else.

In the context of rural Ireland — it is probably the same in Northern Ireland — does

Superintendent O'Brien feel that the ability of the local Garda to deal with the problem is thwarted by officers' fear for the safety of their own families if they become too actively involved in dealing with drug trafficking in rural communities,

where everybody knows everybody else? We see all those drugs lords, who also appear to receive a glamorised run from the media and do not seem to be targeted as a menace to our society, who should be dealt with as quickly as possible. They seem to be allowed to trade endlessly for quite a number of years before finally they are taken to heel by the authorities. Perhaps that is due to the lack of evidence or co-operation by some, but that must be tackled by the Garda.

Finally, does Superintendent O'Brien feel there is enough co-operation across Europe on drugs and drug trafficking? I agree with Paul Flynn that we are talking on a world basis. The extermination of a crop at source might be far more beneficial, because if the people who produce it have any other form of livelihood they might not produce those crops. They might be better off in today's world producing food, even if it were to be highly subsidised by the international community, than being forced, as they are in Afghanistan, to produce this to earn a living; they cannot, due to the war situation, produce food because they do not get paid for it.

**Mr Dominic Grieve MP:** I find myself in, perhaps, surprising agreement with Paul

Flynn. I spent a lot of my time in the late 1980s and 1990s prosecuting for Customs

and Excise. I heard these ritual announcements on the steps of the courts about the Mr Big who had just been caught and sent to prison for 16 years and how this was going to have a profound impact on drug availability, knowing very well that, in fact, the impact on drug availability was absolutely minimal — a blip that would pass within a few weeks. That is not an argument for legalisation, but I would be interested in knowing the Irish perspective on drug rehabilitation. We have spent quite a lot of money in Britain on trying to improve drug rehabilitation, but the evidence, certainly from the United States, is that if you want to get people off drugs, particularly the young on cannabis, cocaine or other hard drugs, only residential rehabilitation actually works, and it is very costly. In Britain, our investment in that is really rather poor, whereas we have been quite prepared to sink our money into drug treatment centres, where you go and see a counsellor every three weeks, which has always struck me as fairly meaningless. I would be very interested to know what the Irish experience is on that and to what extent there has been cross-referencing between our two countries on

what works.

**Mr Brian Hayes TD:** Minister Carey spoke of the prevalent drug, alcohol. There is a lot of moralising in all our countries about hard drugs, but there is very little leadership on the whole question of the drinks industry and its responsibility. This is a particular British-Irish problem. Binge drinking is unique, not just to Britain and Ireland, but to the further north you go in Europe. This is a problem that you do not get in other parts of continental Europe. With regard to this problem, and the increasing availability of drink, does Minister Carey agree that if we are serious about trying to change the embedded culture and acceptance of drink in this country and across these islands, one of the more honest things for a Government to do would be to look at the whole issue of advertising and sponsorship? Why do we continually allow the drinks juggernaut industry to put vast sums of money into sporting clubs up and down this country, which is sending out the counter-opposite message on binge drinking to that of the drinks industry? Is it not a total contradiction and hypocrisy on our part that we expect the drinks industry to fund sports organisations, while trying to lecture young people about the excesses of binge drinking and the like? Does he not agree that it is time to look seriously at this issue, which should be addressed on an east-west, North-South basis? You could do it only on that basis given the prevalence of British media interests in Ireland and vice versa.

Will the Minister also consider the issue of availability? There are many British multiples in the retail sector in Ireland that engage in below-cost selling purely as a means of getting younger people into their shops to buy 24 bottles of whatever for a knockdown rate. They do not have to then produce that information in their accounts in Ireland. Of course, it can be masqueraded in the accounts they produce in Britain. If we are serious about dealing with the prevalent drug that Pat rightly described as alcohol, should we not deal with it in a more forthright way with regard to availability, sponsorship and advertising?

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** We have Henry Bellingham, Johnny Brady, Willie Clarke, Joyce Watson, Dan Boyle and Arthur Morgan waiting to speak.

If there are any others, could they indicate to the Clerk?

**Mr Michael Ring TD:** I spoke to the Clerk when I came in the door. I do not know how he did not see me for the past 20 minutes.

**Mr Henry Bellingham MP:** Just two quick questions. The chief superintendent alluded to the very substantial revenue that the paramilitaries and breakaway

Republican groups are now gaining from trafficking in illegal drugs, and I certainly welcome what he said about the co-operation between the Garda and the PSNI. What percentage of the end users of drugs trafficking by groups in the North are people in the South? Secondly, in the UK, we have a real crisis in our prisons where a lot of young people are going into prison as mild drug users but coming out as hardened addicts because drugs in prisons in Britain are now absolutely rife. Not enough is being done to grip this situation, and I wondered what your experience was here and what you were doing about it.

**Mr Johnny Brady TD:** I would like to compliment Minister Carey and Superintendent Barry O'Brien on their presentation. At one time it was in deprived areas that we saw the scourge of drug misuse, but nowadays it is among the elite and professional people. Recently, in my own county, a very popular and professional person died from the misuse of drugs.

Drugs are being sold and dealing is taking place particularly in nightclubs. I am told by young people who attend those nightclubs that it is commonplace for drug-taking to take place in the toilets. At present, the laws mean that a fine is issued. Rather than a fine, does the Minister agree that the licence should be withdrawn for a period of time for the first offence, and then for the second offence and eventually they would lose the licence altogether?

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** In view of the fact that all MPs that were keen to ask questions have done so, and the fact that they need to get away in order to get a bite of dinner before they go, I will ask the Minister and the superintendent to respond to the questions asked.

**Pat Carey TD:** It is an interesting range of questions. I will try to touch on them as quickly as I can. Charlie O'Connor mentioned networking. I am due to attend a meeting next month to update what is happening on both sides of the border with the implementation of our strategies. We have regular contact across all the Administrations and at EU level. I was in Brussels at a meeting a couple of weeks ago, and our officials are involved regularly in dealing with those kinds of networking arrangements.

Chris Ruane asked about assets recovery. The Criminal Assets Bureau has been quite successful — there is no doubt about that. Significant assets have been either seized or frozen. There is an issue surrounding the period of time the assets must be held — there are seven years when they could be challenged for their return. As to whether

the assets that are recovered should be used in the fight against drugs, I agree in principle, except I do not want to wait around for seven years for money to come on board. We get the money from the Exchequer and, like everything else, it goes back into the general Exchequer's fund when the assets are recovered.

Now, we have profiling at each district. At least one police Garda member is trained in profiling and is looking at lower-level dealers. We generally know a fair bit about the big-timers, but it is the small guys, who are almost the retailers further down the line, that we are trying to capture. That is beginning to show results. However, it may well have knock-on effects, as there is increasing evidence of gang wars when intelligence catches up with smaller dealers.

Paul Flynn raised a fundamental and very interesting point. I have never pretended that we do not have a problem. In fact, I have been trying to tell everybody that we have a real issue — all of us in all our Administrations — with the availability and prevalence of drugs of all descriptions, which ranges from over-the-counter medicines and prescription medicines up to and including cocaine and crack cocaine. Whatever you want, you can find it virtually everywhere.

I do not favour the legalisation of drugs or even the lessening of penalties. I am surprised to hear about the issue of Portugal, because in the evidence we have Portugal has among the highest number of cocaine users in the European Union. There are certainly issues relating to making drugs available as a harm-reduction measure. Our strategy is not police-led; there are five pillars to our strategy. One of those is seizures, but we strongly emphasise education, treatment, research and rehabilitation. There is no doubt that some of those have been more effective than others. I was in Switzerland when there was a pilot project for the legal prescription of heroin. It was abandoned after two years, and I am not aware that any such measure has been restarted. The number of coffee shops in Amsterdam is to be reduced by something like 80 per cent by 2012. The consensus seems to be to make fewer outlets available for any potential misuse.

What has been successful and what has not? We have certainly exceeded our target for seizures. I would be the first to admit that in many other areas we have not

been quite as effective. For example, on treatment there is still quite a deficiency in our Irish experience.

John Ellis asked about education. Programmes in our schools are moderately successful. We have the “Walk Tall” and “On My Own Two Feet” programmes, which, when they are taught, are quite effective. Last week, I met about 250 young people in Galway and, when talking to them quietly, it is evident that the teaching of the programmes is patchy. Sometimes, that is to do with teachers not being comfortable with talking about such a subject or that they do not have any direct experience of it. The other way that we are working on that is through the national youth organisations. Some people who will be talking to you in the afternoon will have some experience on that. Very good programmes are being rolled out by these organisations.

The glamorisation of drugs is a problem and I have no doubt about that. To try and convince the media to take a responsible approach is often difficult. In Ireland, we have good experiences with local radio, which is very helpful, effective and proactive.

On the destruction of crops, I have a paper on that — Michael Mates may know a lot more about this about what is happening in Afghanistan and elsewhere. There is no doubt that we have a bumper crop of heroin for the next couple of years; we also have no great shortage of cocaine coming across various routes up through west Africa. On seizures, the only concrete evidence we have is the 2006 UN report, which suggests that about 40% of the cocaine output of that year was seized by law enforcement agencies — it is difficult to know how accurate that is.

Dominic Grieve mentioned prosecutions. Prosecutions alone will not work. Our evidence suggests that when we are seen to be vigorously pursuing the bigger operators, that has the greater impact. In our case, when local communities have got involved we have seen the greatest success. Statutory bodies on their own do not get anywhere, so we place a lot of emphasis on the community and the voluntary sector. When I was appointed to this job, the first place I visited was Tallaght — Brian Hayes and Charlie O’Connor will know it — which was a wasteland back in the 1970s. Now, many projects have been built up through co-operation between the voluntary sector and the community, which has led to a significant improvement. We

have taken action such as rolling out the youth services and facilities fund. I agree with Brian about the involvement of sports organisations in sponsorship. That is a big issue, and we need to address it. It is only when we implement alternatives for young people, such as the youth cafes here in Wexford, and put plenty of youth workers and youth development officers on the streets that we obtain results. Dominic Grieve mentioned rehabilitation. The national drugs strategy team and the national advisory committee on drugs published a report at this time last year, and it included several recommendations on rehabilitation. In-patient and residential treatment is part of the solution. We were asked to increase the number of detox beds, for example, but detoxification is only part of the solution. We need a seamless service from the time when substance misuse first impacts on someone through detox, aftercare and rehabilitation. We have implemented community employment schemes, and 1,300 of those schemes are ring-fenced for people on drug rehabilitation programmes.

On the sale of drugs in clubs, Superintendent O'Brien has told me that it is possible for such clubs to be closed under the licensing laws. However, I am not aware of any clubs that have been closed down in that way.

**Mr Willie Clarke MLA:** It is my belief that cocaine use is acceptable in certain sectors of our communities, particularly among the middle classes, which has already been outlined. Cocaine use is almost respectable, which in my opinion and that of most people here is totally unacceptable. Gun crime is associated with cocaine use and cocaine trafficking. In my experience in the six counties, the PSNI focuses most of its resources on raiding working-class areas while ignoring affluent areas where large amounts of the drug are dissipated. What measures are currently being undertaken to tackle cocaine abuse in the 26 counties?

**Senator Dan Boyle:** The Minister has mentioned the growing problem of poly-drug use, which involves drugs being mixed with each other and with alcohol. That makes it difficult to deal with the drug problem. Bearing in mind Paul Flynn's opening contribution, why is there such a reluctance to use harm reduction as a policy measure? I know that harm reduction might be taken as indicating a tolerance of drugs, but I do not think that harm reduction means an acceptance of drugs. If effective harm reduction policies existed, problem drug users could be identified earlier in their dependency cycle, which would provide a balance between justice-based approaches and health-based approaches. We lack — this is true across all jurisdictions — an approach to drug users who are harming themselves and others other than prison or incarceration in a mental-health situation. We need safe houses and halfway houses where people can come down

off whatever they are on.

On the other victims of drug use other than drug users themselves, there is a need for family support measures. A person might cure their own dependency and reliance on a particular drug, but the scars are left with people who, for example, lived with them. As societies, we are failing to address that issue.

**Mr Arthur Morgan TD:** The superintendent told us that most operations are intelligence-led. Are the public co-operating more with the Garda, because we all know that on some occasions there is a culture of non-co-operation? Is that situation improving?

On arrests, almost all communities can identify two or three low-level retailers, as Pat Carey rightly described them. Is it possible to deal with such people more effectively? I know that you are looking in that direction, but will you indicate when that will be stepped up? Resources are always an issue for the Garda, and will you indicate how serious the resources problem is?

Returning to the issue of communities co-operating with the Garda, how close are we to implementing a mechanism to empower communities to recognise and identify the problem people and to work with the Garda, health agencies and other services, including local authority housing services?

I was going to discuss legalisation, but that is a debate in its own right, so I will hold on to that contribution. Go raibh maith agat.

**Mrs Joyce Watson AM:** My question is challenging. I have conducted quite a bit of research into drug and alcohol abuse and misuse. Has anybody researched the use of new-style alcoholic drinks, which contain huge amounts of additives that cause hyperactivity and behavioural problems? If you link that point to the fact that those drinks also contain alcohol, I observe that that can be a problem.

More controversially, evidence — the Bentley Foundation report — shows that when large-scale seizures of drugs take place, crime increases because demand remains the same while supply has gone down, which means that the price has increased. That is in stark contrast with the national picture. However, the British crime survey tells us that the types of crime linked to drug use have fallen. Are we measuring the wrong types of crime? We have heard no mention of people, whether male or female, prostituting themselves to feed their habit. It is difficult to find statistics in that field.

**Mr Michael Ring TD:** I want to ask two or three questions. In Ireland, we are changing the way we police, but is the change really working in terms of the

amount

of drugs that are seized? Is it time to change the way policing operations are conducted?

On compulsory drug testing, there are a lot of accidents in this country in which people are killed on the roads. Those cases do not all involve drink-driving, and some of them must involve drugs. There should be compulsory drug testing in the workplace and on the roads. It is time to introduce such a measure, because the legal powers are needed.

As I said to the Minister in a Committee meeting last week, the Government are so

hypocritical about drinking. Last year, the Irish Government gave out 91,000 extensions for opening hours. The opening hours had already been increased, but

pubs and bars went looking for further licences to extend their hours. The state is

making a fortune out of that, and the vested interests are out there promoting drink. It is time to get rid of Guinness all-Ireland football, and it is time to get rid of the

Heineken cup. The Government should introduce legislation to deal with that problem.

Our country has the highest consumption of alcohol in Europe, yet 23% of people do

not drink at all, so the people who are drinking are drinking a colossal amount.

There

has always been hypocrisy about drink in our country. If somebody has cancer, we

will get them treated, but if somebody is drunk, we say that he is okay. It is time that

we took a harder line on the abuse of alcohol in our country, because alcohol destroys families and lives. We cannot allow the Government to obtain vast amounts of revenue and pretend that they are going to introduce legislation. The drink culture in our country has gone on for many years, but people are beginning to speak out and need to speak out more. I know that the Minister is committed on drugs, but we are soft on drink in our country. The vested interests have input with Ministers, and we are hypocritical, because we hold our surgeries and clinics in pubs. We should take a stronger line on drink, and the Government must stop the hypocrisy over the revenue that they obtain from the drinks industry.

**Mr Seymour Crawford TD:** I apologise that I must leave soon. I thank Minister Carey for being here today. With regard to party politics, we work together closely. I

also want to thank the Co-Chairmen of the Body, whom I have met in various places

in more difficult times.

Deputy Ring has covered a lot of what I want to say. The drinks issue is extremely serious. We cannot deny that alcohol is a drug. Its use is compounded by the use of other drugs, which forms a cocktail. Some years ago, drugs were only in the main towns, but now they are in every village in Ireland. My area is on the border, and it is vital that there are close contacts between the PSNI and the authorities in general. I know that such contacts are being built up. I urge the Government to bite the bullet on the advertising of alcohol to our youth. That must be done through bodies such as this and through media bodies such as the BBC and RTE.

**Dr Alasdair McDonnell MLA, MP:** I want to take a minute to address the intelligent comments made by Deputy Michael Ring. Alcohol is, if anything, a bigger problem than drugs.

In the time permitted to me, I want to ask the Minister and the superintendent about paramilitary involvement in drug importation and distribution in the Irish Republic. In my experience in Belfast, which was obtained while wearing my medical hat rather than my political hat, former paramilitary groups and individuals draw on their skills and ability to obtain muscle. In 95% of cases, that muscle is used to exploit marginalised and disadvantaged people in our society — those who can least afford drugs, and those who are least capable of managing them. In my limited experience, the poor are made very much poorer and are exploited — indeed, they are sometimes driven to suicide. I wonder whether paramilitary involvement is exclusive to Belfast, or whether it goes wider than that.

**Pat Carey TD:** In reply to Willie Clarke, cocaine has been glamorised. Before Christmas, there were a number of cocaine-related deaths. Television and the national media did not do themselves a service by the way in which they glamorised the issue. I think that the current approach is more enlightened, and I hope that it lasts. We have run a national campaign called, “The Party’s Over”. It was conducted electronically using digital media such as Facebook and YouTube, and it targeted the 15-to-34 age group. There were some billboards, but not too many. The billboards stated that mixing alcohol and cocaine increases your chances of having a heart attack by a factor of 24, which is a message that seems to have resonated with an awful lot of people. Based on a pilot programme that we conducted two years ago in Dublin, we have run localised campaigns supervised by local and regional drug taskforces. That has involved, for example, the use of telephone numbers by which members of the public can phone in when they suspect that drug-related activity is taking place. The pilot campaign was quite successful, and we will conduct the new campaign over a three-year period.

Senator Dan Boyle raised the issue of poly-drug use. There is a propensity in Ireland, and elsewhere, to use several substances together. On harm reduction, anyone who has experienced trying to open a methadone clinic or a needle exchange programme will know that harm reduction measures are difficult to implement. I still bear the scars from insisting that a methadone clinic be opened in my constituency. We are trying to mediate with communities around the country. In the midlands, for example, services are very poor. Halfway houses are part of our treatment process. Voluntary organisations are involved — in Dan Boyle's constituency, there are more than two or three. There are also three-quarter-way houses, where people can stay for as long as is necessary.

On co-operation with the public, there are 12 joint-policing committees among the local authorities, and I hope that those committees will be rolled out in every local authority. They allow the Garda to get together with community representatives. There are also safety fora, of which there are two in my constituency. They are a bit like the curate's egg — they are good in parts.

Joyce Watson asked about research. The national advisory committee on drugs has conducted a lot of research, and we can give you a lot of it. The most recent prevalence study involves the micro-analysis of an old health board area. It will be ready in about six weeks' time, and it considers issues around alcohol and other substances. It also considers links with prostitution. We tried to conduct some research with an NGO that works with streetworkers, but engagement with streetworkers was poor, and we must return to the question of how we can conduct such research. We need more evidence-based work.

Michael Ring commented on alcohol and drug testing. On drug testing, there are at least six pilot kits being tried out by the Garda. Considerable progress has been made. When I first entered this job, I was shown five or six different kits. The issue of pub extensions is being addressed in Minister Lenihan's new legislation, and many extensions will be cut. On drug testing in the workplace, the health and safety authority is working on guidelines. As far as I am aware, that will be almost mandatory by 2012. As I have said, protocols are currently being devised.

The north-west alcohol forum is a cross-border body between Derry and

Donegal. It is a good example of how a local community working with the Health Service Executive can develop a programme around alcohol consumption. That is a good model that we should try to replicate elsewhere. I am committed to the notion of having a single strategy for alcohol and drug misuse, because alcohol is the big issue for us. We will publish research on that point shortly.

**Detective Superintendent Barry O'Brien:** I want to make one or two comments about specific issues connected with policing. On assets, cashflow is, as I said in my presentation, an important issue. For anybody in the business, cash is king. If you have cash, you can have a serious impact in drug trafficking. Fortunately, recent changes in criminal legislation have meant that we have a procedure for dealing with cash seized in searches.

At the local level, perceptions are important. If, for example, an individual is caught with a substantial quantity of drugs and goes to prison, the local community will see that that has an impact on the standard of living of people associated with that individual. There must be seen to be direct and meaningful repercussions for individuals, if they are caught in possession of substantial quantities of drugs in terms of both incarceration and wealth derived from drug dealing.

On customs and large seizures, one of the key determinants is the impact of policing on the use of drugs. If people have a substantial risk of being caught if they use drugs, it will affect the times when they use drugs and the frequency with which they use them.

Not all the issues are exclusively for the police. Roadside drugs-testing is an issue for the police in terms of road traffic enforcement. Drug testing in the workplace increases the risk for people who engage in drug use on either a sporadic or a regular basis of having their habit detected. That is an important point in relation to the use of drugs in society.

The issues around drugs and alcohol have been well versed, so I will not go into them.

On drug use in prison, I will put on my national drugs strategy unit hat and say that there have been developments in the Irish Prison Service with regard to treatment in the prison setting. It is possible to consider prisons as the largest form of

residential

treatment, if we were to choose to use them in that way. A key determinant is access to services in the prison setting. Those services include not only treatment, but education, development and training.

Another key determinant, which we have in some local drugs taskforces, is

prison

link workers, who work with prisoners for four or five months before release.

Those

workers engage with issues such as where prisoners go after they leave prison, access to housing and other factors. That ensures that prisoners do not walk out of prison and go back into old habits. There are key issues around the level of service in prisons and services for people who come out of prison. The Minister has just reminded me that Merchants Quay has recently secured a contract to provide counselling services in prisons.

An interesting question was asked about prostitution, drugs and criminality. I sit on

the national advisory committee on drugs, which recently researched drug use in the

sex industry. The principal difficulty was accessing the client group, and the findings

are therefore more qualitative than quantitative.

On acquisitive crime and drug usage, in 1996 we undertook a study, where we linked

the drug-using population throughout the country to recorded or detected crime.

Many of you will have heard the claim that 80% of crime is due to drug use. We

found that 66% of acquisitive crime was due to drug use. We conducted a similar survey in 2001, and found that that figure had reduced to 28%, which was a

dramatic

fall. Once people are in a reasonably stable environment for treatment, they

engage in far less crime. Another key point is how high we set the bar. Many

people present for treatment on many occasions, because they will not

necessarily succeed on their first or second attempt. We have discussed harm

reduction and low-threshold access to services. We should not label approaches

as "harm reduction"; low-threshold access is the correct approach.

On paramilitary involvement in drugs, we do not have that experience here in the

South. As I have said, we have enough thugs who are not linked to paramilitary

activity who are involved in the drug trade, extorting money and recovering

debts.

That is not to say that we have not caught such individuals in certain operations with

the PSNI. However, we must work on evidence, which does not show a

structured

link in that regard.

**Pat Carey TD:** In the course of his contribution, Seymour Crawford said nice things about me. I have thoroughly enjoyed my experience with the British-Irish interparliamentary body, and it is great to have been invited back. The body has a great future. We live in a dramatically changing political situation, and this body's work has contributed greatly to a better Ireland and to better relations between our jurisdictions.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** I thank the Minister for his co-operation in putting the agenda together, and I thank both speakers for their comprehensive presentations. The Session will now suspend for lunch, and we will return at 2.30 pm sharp.

*The sitting was suspended at 1.10 pm and resumed at 2.41 pm.*

**The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Peter Hain MP):** Order. The Body will now resume in public session. I am pleased to welcome Michael Wall, chairman of the Cornmarket Project, who is here with the co-ordinator, Paul Delaney, and the general manager, Bernard O'Brien. Michael will introduce the other two, who will make a presentation on the drugs problem and its effect and impact on our communities. Michael, you are very welcome.

**Mr Michael Wall:** Thank you. Co-Chairmen, ladies and gentlemen. The Wexford Area Partnership was founded in 1996 as a community-based initiative, dealing with social inclusion. That was its main focus. In the early days of establishing the partnership organisation, it rapidly became clear that serious drug abuse, although not prevalent in our community at that time, was heading our way fast. We knew from experiences elsewhere, particularly in the UK and in Dublin, that Wexford would soon have a serious drugs problem, as would all towns and areas subsequently. It was also clear to us in our evaluation at the time that the community must play a central part in any battle against the drugs scourge and that no one interest group had the answer. Therefore, we set about establishing a strong and dynamic community-based initiative.

We also saw the link between drugs and crime, and so, with our partners in the probation service, the Cornmarket Project was founded. I will now hand you over to our general manager, Bernard O'Brien.

**Mr Bernard O'Brien:** Co-Chairmen, I will just spend a few moments putting the

Cornmarket Project into context, both in policy terms and in the context of the Wexford Area Partnership. The Wexford Area Partnership is a local partnership company that was established under the national development plan and funded through a programme called the local development social inclusion programme.

That

programme is administered by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht

Affairs. It is a partnership in its structure and its modus operandi. On its structure, it

has a governing board of elected representatives, statutory agencies, social partners

and the community and voluntary sector. Its modus operandi is based on partnership principles, and all of its actions and projects are partnerships in practice.

We work with a number of target groups that experience social exclusion in our community. However, today, we are talking particularly about those who experience

substance misuse and those who are involved in anti-social or criminal behaviour. In

addition to our getting money from the national development plan under the local

development social exclusion programme, we work with other Government departments and state agencies to deliver a range of social inclusion programmes in

the area. In that, we work with the regional drugs taskforce, the probation service,

Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS), the Training and Employment Authority; the Department of Social and Family Affairs; the Health Service Executive; the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform; the Department of Transport; Sustainable Energy Ireland and the Department of Education and Science.

However,

today, we are talking particularly about the Cornmarket Project that is jointly funded

on a partnership basis by us, the regional drugs taskforce, the probation service, FÁS

and the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

*2.45 pm*

In the partnership as a whole, we have a range of programmes aimed at tackling social exclusion, including community development; adult education and training;

traveller development programmes; third-level access programmes; employment

guidance; work with youth at risk; rural transport and addressing fuel poverty — others are listed in the PowerPoint presentation. The Cornmarket Project is a specific

response by the partnership to the problems of substance misuse and antisocial

and  
criminal behaviours. The project resides within the partnership model of the Wexford area partnership, and therefore we can ensure that it is based in the community, and that there is ownership of the problem of substance misuse by the partnership itself, as well as by the various communities in which we work. We ensure that there is an interagency approach to the work, and that there are links with other partnership programmes, and, indeed, other state programmes, to support those who are socially excluded. We have a focus on training and rehabilitation, and on maintaining and encouraging the full participation of socially excluded groups in the social and economic life of the community. It is with this background that we want to present the Cornmarket Project to you today. I now hand over to my colleague, Paul Delaney.

**Mr Paul Delaney:** It gives me great pleasure to address you today. As I listened in this morning to Minister Carey and Barry O'Brien from the national drugs strategy team, it struck me what an appropriate body this is to discuss an issue that has no respect for geographical, social or economic boundaries. I would like to give you a flavour of what it is like to work on the ground on the drugs issue here in Wexford, and talk a bit about how we do it.

I will preface my remarks by saying that Wexford is not unique in this regard — we would probably all accept that there is a growing and serious problem in terms of substance misuse, both of drugs and alcohol. I can give you an idea of the cost of substance misuse in Wexford. During the last year for which we have statistics, which is 2007, the Cornmarket Project dealt with 210 individuals from throughout County Wexford — not just the hinterlands of Wexford town itself, but the major urban centres such as Enniscorthy, New Ross and Gorey. That is in stark contrast to the number of people that we dealt with 10 years ago, in our first year of operation — just 28 individuals. It was interesting to hear various speakers, including the Minister and the chair of the national drug strategy team, talk about the issue of polydrug use — the concurrent use of different substances. That certainly concurs with our experience, as the vast majority of people who present to us, as a treatment and rehabilitation agency, are using drugs such as cannabis and alcohol, ecstasy and cocaine, alcohol and heroin, and so on.

Another interesting statistic is that 70% of those who presented for treatment were already involved with the criminal justice system. I suppose that that is no surprise, and does not differ greatly from the areas in which you work yourselves. Probably

more ominous was the fact that, in 2007, we had a total of 57 active heroin users presenting to the service; that is in stark contrast to the three heroin users that I dealt with as an addiction counsellor in Wexford 10 years ago. Again, there is the inexorable march of heroin and it is getting rooted in towns such as Wexford.

To think about it in a practical way, we know, for instance, through our work with substance misusers in Wexford, that each fix, if you like, of heroin costs €25. We also know through our work that most dependent heroin users will use four or five fixes a day, so it does not take long to extrapolate the costs of that as being an average of €36,000 a year. That might sound phenomenal, but that is what is going on in our society. So, even assuming the best-case scenario and that there are not 200 heroin users throughout the county of Wexford, but perhaps only 100 or 150, it still amounts to a huge amount of money. In the case of Wexford, €4 million a year is being spent on heroin. If we include all of the other range of drugs such as cocaine, which, as the Minister said, is becoming a more predominant drug; cannabis, which is freely available in most counties throughout Ireland, and ecstasy, which is often a drug used at weekends, it does not take long to come up with an approximate figure of around €10 million a year for the illegal drugs trade in Wexford — which is, of course, leaving out the whole question of alcohol misuse.

The Cornmarket Project targets groups, so what do we do as a project and to whom do we offer services? One thing that we are insistent on is that we work with those clients who have serious substance misuse problems that perhaps no other agencies or groups will work with, because of their backgrounds and their behavioural problems. So we work with substance misusers of drugs and alcohol and with offenders, ex-offenders and ex-prisoners. When I say ex-prisoners, people often have the idea that I am talking about people who have spent long terms in prison, but, unfortunately, many of the people in our client group have served relatively short but frequent prison sentences.

I think that Bernard, the partnership's general manager, made reference to the fact that the Cornmarket Project works within a partnership system, and the overseeing committee for the daily work and the strategy of the project is overseen by quite a representative body that includes the voluntary, statutory and community sectors.

We are a multi-agency-funded initiative at this stage and we receive our funding from Minister Carey's office, through the national drugs strategy team, from the

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform through the probation service, from FÁS, which is the national training and employment authority, and from the Department of Social and Family Affairs. Where do the people who attend the project come from? Geographically they are spread throughout the county of Wexford and it might interest some of you to know, while you are here, that Wexford has a population of just in excess of 130,000, so it is quite a big part of the south-east, population wise. We receive referrals from the probation and court services, from doctors and from health and social services. People can also self-refer. We also get quite a degree of referrals from the families and those concerned about people who have substance misuse problems. It is true to say that many of our referrals are by word of mouth, and it is important that the people who have access to the project feel that it has done them some good and refer friends and relatives into it.

What sort of a model do we operate? I know that some people are interested in this in terms of comparisons perhaps with what you see happening in your own constituencies. Heavy emphasis was placed this morning by Minister Carey and Barry O'Brien on the need to have a joined-up, connected service when dealing with substance misusers. We would adopt that model and say that a continuum of service is needed, so, for instance, we work with people who may still be fairly chaotic in their drug use, right through to those who have gained some stability in their life but still need support. We have outreach services and a drop-in service, which is that lowthreshold aspect that Barry O'Brien referred to this morning. We have a stabilisation day programme, which has been quite successful in the sense that we have managed to make good linkages with local general practitioners, and we offer a community detox service, which has proven to be very fruitful in terms of giving both the client and the GP support to deal with substance misuse. We have a counselling service—I know that someone said this morning that giving people just counselling is probably not such a great idea, and I would probably concur with him, even though I am an addiction counsellor. Counselling in isolation does not tend to yield great dividends. It needs to be part of an overall jigsaw of services that people receive in their lives. We also have a training and rehabilitation project, and the mugs and t-shirts that you have as souvenirs in front of you are produced by the clients on it. It deals with 16 former drug users, and is funded by FÁS. People stay on it for about a year. The idea is that people get a chance to deal not just with their drug use — because, sometimes, strange as it may seem, that might be the easy bit of the equation — but with the other psychosocial issues that most people who have spent any length of time immersed in the quagmire of drug misuse have. We also have a strong and vibrant family support group, which meets fortnightly here in the centre of Wexford town. The average attendance of that group is some 15 parents, who are predominantly female, although we are beginning to attract a lot more men to the group.

So, how does our model work? First, it is accessible, and that is the key to

effective

interventions with drug users. There is no sense in asking people to come back in eight months when we might have a spot. There is no sense in asking people to be

motivated next week when they are motivated today. You need to be able to deal with people as they present themselves. It is community based; I know that Minister Carey laid an emphasis on that this morning, talking about the role of the community and voluntary sector. People can be intimidated, rightly or wrongly, by the statutory

services. It deals with people where they are. I know that there was some discussion

about harm reduction this morning — I often think that the ultimate harm reduction is total abstinence, so, harm reduction means different things to people, but even if it means giving people practical advice and information that might reduce the harm to them or to their community, we see it as a valuable intervention. It goes right through to total abstinence and getting people completely free of drugs.

We also invest a lot in individual programmes for people, because, again, drug use is

often symptomatic of an array of underlying social issues. It is also a confidential service. Michael and Bernard spoke in their introduction about where the Cornmarket is located. We are in the framework of the partnership. One thing that seems to work well is that people can attend the project without being labelled. They can go in for a range of services and they will not necessarily be labelled as a “druggie”, an “addict” or an “alkie”.

To mention briefly the age profile of the people attending the project, it is probably

no different from that of most projects throughout the country. There is a predominance, up to 67 % or 68%, of people in the 17 to 26 age bracket; the next highest bracket, 30%, is people aged 26 to 38; and then there are those aged 38 plus,

who tend to be people who have become alcohol dependent or who might be longerterm drug users. The gender of people presenting to the project is predominantly male, as you can see. However, one disturbing trend is that the number of young female clients presenting to the project has grown quite significantly in the past two years. A lot of that is concurrent with the development of cocaine use in Wexford.

I will give you a brief vignette, taken from the life of a client who attends the Cornmarket Project at the moment. I have changed his name, but Peter started using

alcohol, cannabis and ecstasy at about the age of 15. He got into a lot of trouble, he

was in and out of hospital, and was eventually sent to prison, because he had so many charges — they were fairly minor, but there was a catalogue of them. Once released, he was soon back into his old ways, because he came straight back into an

environment in which there was a lot of drug use. Indeed, things got worse, and he started smoking heroin. There were a lot of issues: he left school early, there was family dysfunction, and he ended up in prison and involved with the probation services. He engaged with our counselling and stabilisation services, and he was among the first of our clients to succeed on our community detoxification services.

The staff on the project did a substantial amount of work with the local GP to ensure that Peter could detoxify safely without having to go off to a residential treatment centre — which he would not do anyway. During this time, his mother attended the family support group.

*3.00 pm*

However, as is typical of the group of clients that we are talking about, he found it impossible to get a step up the ladder; his name had gone before him and it was impossible for him to get a place even on a training programme. He was referred to our in-house training and rehabilitation programme where, as I mentioned earlier, his psychosocial needs were addressed. By that, I mean addressing fundamental issues such as literacy problems, anger management issues and unresolved bereavement problems from his father's death at a young age. On completion of our programme, he intends to move on to become a mechanic. He remains drug-free today, and his mother is still attending our family support group, struggling still to cope with years of family dysfunction.

I will mention briefly some of the challenges, as we see them, facing the Cornmarket Project in County Wexford. Some people will be aware — certainly, the Irish delegates here will be aware — that three young people died of suspected drugs overdoses in Wexford in separate incidents just after Christmas. In addition, five members of our existing family support group have also lost children to drug misuse over the past few years. There are gaps in services. As Minister Carey mentioned this morning — and I know that he is very supportive in trying to ensure that we get access to a range of services — one of the services sadly missing in Wexford is a methadone service. Some of the other services that would help to ensure that we do not inherit long-term problems include a needle exchange programme, residential detoxification facilities, a halfway house, which Minister Carey mentioned this morning, and a family support respite centre.

In conclusion, I will draw a comparison. People spoke this morning about the

cost of imprisonment and the cost of treatment and rehabilitation. You may be surprised to know, and I think that it is accepted by the Government, that it costs €85,000 to keep somebody in jail for a year, and that cost does not include all the associated pre-costs of courts, probation, legal aid and so on. Of course, it is very seldom, if ever, that most drug users get rehabilitation to any great extent when they are in prison. A project such as ours — I would imagine that it is similar throughout the country — costs less than €3,000 to treat somebody for a year. We would be advocates of community sanctions, especially for minor drug offences, as opposed to locking young people up. Certainly, in other jurisdictions, and in the UK, as an alternative to prison, that seems to work reasonably well.

Finally, we would place an emphasis on the concept of restorative justice. That is the concept that young offenders who have been caught up in criminal activity because of their addiction issues give something back to the community. We do that through our training and rehabilitation programme. What you see there — the mug and the t-shirt — are just a sample, but the 16 clients on the programme produce a range of promotional materials, which we supply to youth services, community organisations and sports facilities, all at a very basic price — really, it is a token price. Doing this lets the young people know that they are giving something back to society, and it creates a two-way link with other sectors of society in Wexford. [*Applause.*]

**The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Peter Hain MP):** Paul, I thank you and your colleagues for a very interesting presentation. Brian Adam has the first question. Does anybody else want to ask a question?

**Mr Brian Adam MSP:** In a previous life, I used to do drug testing. I was interested in the fact that you were clearly looking at the range of drugs and other substances that were being misused. Could you give me some idea of how you monitored that? Was it just self-assessment or were you literally testing them? I am rather interested in the prevalence rates that you have, which are around about a tenth of those in my area. What might you consider a success; would it be harm reduction or abstinence and sustaining abstinence? How would you go about measuring that?

**Mr Charlie O'Connor TD:** I also wish be associated with the welcome extended to

the delegation. I will be brief, Co-Chairman, so that you will not have to say to me what your other colleague said to me this morning. I will make up for this morning.

*[Interruption.]*

No, I am not sensitive. It was a very worthwhile presentation. Sometimes, in all our communities, we have to try to get the message across, and I am not so sure that the family support element of what you are trying to achieve gets the same recognition everywhere. I just wondered if it is the same in Wexford as it would be in Dublin and as it would be in Tallagh. I am interested in knowing how the group has got that message across and how you have succeeded.

**The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Peter Hain MP):** Paul, as you may have gathered, with colleagues, I am going to take all the questions and then you can do an omnibus reply.

**The Lord Dubs:** That was a very impressive presentation; thank you for that. I have two questions. I am conscious that one of them I should have asked of the Minister of State this morning, rather than you, but it is this: can you guess or estimate how many people are in prison instead of receiving the sort of support that they could get? In other words, how many people end up in prison who have a drug problem and who cannot be diverted from prison in time? Could you give me a percentage or some figure? Secondly, what is your success rate? When somebody is referred to you or is self-referred, what is your success rate? It cannot be 100%. Can you give some idea of how well you are doing and how you judge that?

**Baroness Ó Catháin OBE:** I have just two questions. First, how do you recruit the key workers because, obviously, they are the key, and what sort of training do they have to have? I have asked that question because I am aware that there is a huge body of underutilised resource among people who retire early, who in turn wish to give something back to the community. You talk about the drug users wishing to give something back to the community through the Cornmarket Project; thank you for the mugs and the t-shirts. Is there any way of mobilising people who, say, retired at the age of 50 and play golf or do other things, but who could really be trained as key workers? That would actually give the drug abusers a sense of self-esteem. A lot of people get into drugs because they do not have any self-esteem, because they come

from fractured families or there is not a supportive family network. Often, teenagers particularly will relate to older people who make them realise that they have a lot to offer and that they are nice and caring human beings, if only they were on the right track.

**Hon Stephen Charles Rodan MHK:** I wanted to ask about access to the service

—  
you made reference to people contacting you and being seen within a week. What

proportion of your clients is referred to you by other agencies or through the criminal justice system, and what proportion is self-referred? In respect of the confidentiality and anonymity of the service that you talked about, how confident can those who self-refer be that their identities will be kept anonymous and that any confidence would be respected when, presumably, you have to share information with other statutory elements of your organisation and, as you mentioned, the police and the probation service? When they elect to refer themselves, how confident can people be that confidentiality will be honoured throughout the process?

We have a voluntary agency dealing with drug and alcohol advice. There are some issues about people being reluctant to contact that agency because, ideally, it would wish to share statistical information with other statutory agencies, and as a result there is some reluctance to engage with the service.

**Mrs Joyce Watson AM:** Thank you for a really good presentation. I have a few key questions. You said that there was no methadone service, and I find that concerning. Have you considered, as we do in Wales, using community pharmacies to deliver such services? How many people have left prison as a direct consequence of illegal drug use? How many mental health referrals do you have, and how do you deal with those people?

**Senator Cecilia Keaveney:** Thank you for the presentation — it was very interesting.

During the past five years, I was the chair of the Oireachtas Committee for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, and we did a few reports on cocaine, cannabis, alcohol, national drug strategies and so on. Much of the work that is going on around the country is getting good recognition from the Minister; far be it for me

to say that I hope that he is not moved from where he is, because he still has a lot of work that he wants and needs to do. However, if he is going to be elevated to somewhere else, he probably will not say “no” either.

The cost comparison is stark. The Department of Finance is always looking to know what the value is for the Department of Finance. Ultimately, if you look at the statistics — 2,000 versus 80,000 — you get a fair few through the system in your way. I believe in community service. Are you able to identify, or is it possible for communities to identify, who these drug addicts are going to be — the dysfunctional family, for example? There must be several categories. Are you aware of any mechanism, or is there some mechanism that we could explore, to try to identify people before they find themselves in the situation where they are 70 per cent involved in the law, and you are dealing with them as already confirmed addicts?

I am interested in the gateway role of alcohol. Do you see alcohol as a first step to drug abuse, or do you think that, for some people, it is just their drug of choice, and for other people it is not a first step on a slippery slope?

I am also interested in the stabilisation day programme. I do not know whether it was just the way that it was put on the screen, but beside the stabilisation programme slide, I saw a lot of paints; I also have an interest in music, art and drama therapies. Do people open up easily when they are on your programmes? Are they at the stage where they open up easily and tell you what their problems are, or is it still an issue to get them to talk about what is bringing them to be where they are? Do you have access to drama, art and music therapies, which are now recognised as helping people to communicate when they might not communicate very easily through words? Go raibh maith agat.

*3.15 pm*

**Mrs Rosemary Butler AM:** Thank you. That was an interesting presentation. What is worrying is how similar the problems are wherever we look. We are all approaching things from a slightly different angle, but no-one has yet cracked how to deal with them. You may have already mentioned this and I missed it, but I am interested in the issue of younger children getting onto alcohol and then moving onto drugs. I have some figures here, showing that, in Wales in 2006-07, 114 children under the age of 14 and 371 children under the age of 16 were admitted to hospital with alcohol-related problems. I have read a report recently about children in primary school being admitted to hospital as a result of alcohol abuse. Are you doing much work along those lines to try to persuade corner shops not to sell alcohol, or mothers not to go to the supermarket to buy a bottle of vodka for the 14-year-old to go out on a Friday night? It is an education issue. I think that I missed the link between alcohol and other drugs, and how you are looking

at that.

**The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Peter Hain MP):** Paul and colleagues, before I call you to respond to those questions, I will ask a question myself. I do not know if Dai Lloyd would agree with me, but we have quite a problem of solvent abuse in south Wales, which is interlinked and mixed up with drug abuse. I think that your focus was mainly on drug abuse, but glue sniffing and sniffing deodorants and all kinds of things seem to be problems that lead to other problems. I look forward to your response before we close the session.

**Paul Delaney:** Thank you, Peter. To take the last question first, because it is such a topical issue, I was at a team meeting with my team this morning before I came here, and we received very bad news that a young man had been very badly burned last night in Wexford as a consequence of solvent abuse, where the solvent that he was using had ignited. So, solvent abuse is still quite an issue; it tends to be one of these episodic-type drugs that peaks and then goes into troughs, but it is very much in the mix.

In terms of testing, we do not conduct any tests on clients. However, we have very good working relationships with the local HSE clinic, where clients are required, for instance, to show evidence of a clean urinalysis, maybe in relation to court cases or even in terms of family monitoring. The clinic is always very willing to work with us around that. We do not do the work, because it requires a strict controlled environment for it to stand up in an evidential way. We leave it to our colleagues in the statutory services.

In terms of family support, I agree entirely with Charlie. Family support has always been the poor cousin of the whole substance misuse area. However, I think that things are changing, and I am aware that Minister Carey has been very supportive in terms of resourcing the national family support framework, which is now up and running. For the first time in Wexford, in the last few months, we have a full-time family support worker who is attached to the regional drugs taskforce. So, I think that people are gradually beginning to understand that it is a very complex situation, and that supporting families is also a way to deal with

addiction.

On how many people there are in prison as a result of substance misuse, I do not honestly know; I am not sure if those figures are available. I will shortly be talking on a platform with John Lonergan, the governor of Mountjoy Prison, the largest prison in the state, and I know that John would say that the vast majority of people under a certain age — under 28 years of age, I think — were in the prison for substance misuse-related issues. I am not sure how many prisoners the prison holds, but that is a significant body of people.

In terms of the success rate, I am always a bit sceptical talking about success rates.

However, in 2004, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform commissioned an external review and evaluation of the Cornmarket Project, and we were able to show very clearly that 30% of all of those who attended our programmes achieved what we would call “hard progressions”. In other words, they went on to gain a drug-free status or they went on to gain progression routes into employment or mainstream education or training. Equally interesting would be that 87% of all of those who had previously been in trouble with the court system remained out of trouble and did not come to the police’s attention a year after leaving the project. So, we would regard that as being reasonably significant, although it is an ongoing struggle.

How we recruit key workers is a very interesting question. Our core team is made up of nine people, and is supported by the Wexford area partnership in terms of administration and financial management support. You made an interesting point about the utilisation of older people, who can give so much, even in terms of being role models. I take your point on that. A number of our clients have dysfunctional family backgrounds and are badly in need of role models to give them that type of support. As it stands, all of our staff are qualified; they all have level 3 qualifications of one form or another, specialising in the area of addiction. I am interested in the possibility of developing a volunteer aspect to the staff complement. This is something that I have discussed with the management of the partnership, and I am sure that it is something that we will do.

With regard to access and the way in which people access the programme, referral is a two-way process. We take referrals from both the statutory services such as the

probation service, the HSE, and from other statutory bodies. However, we also refer people into that. This relates to the question posed on mental health in relation to the way in which we work with people who have both mental health and substance misuse issues. This is a worrying sector of clients that we deal with, because they can sometimes fall between two stools. In the past, people who presented to mental health services would be told, "Deal with your addiction issue and then come back to us."

Equally, people who presented to addiction services would be told, "Deal with your mental health issue and then come back to us." We have good relationships with our colleagues in the mental health services in Wexford in the HSE and try to work closely with them in terms of the clients who present like that. Methadone is an issue. I know that it is something that is not an appropriate intervention for everyone; I would be the first to say that. I do not believe that methadone is a magic wand by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, all of the international research shows that using methadone alone has a low success rate. Therefore, methadone needs to be put in context. It has to be delivered with a raft of psychosocial interventions. If it is not, then it becomes just a medical intervention and, if it is just a medical intervention trying to deal with a very complex issue, then the success rates are not high. Therefore, although we are saying that we need a methadone service in Wexford — as I think all areas do — it is only another part of a complex jigsaw.

With regard to the link between alcohol and drug misuse, there is unequivocal, clear evidence that many young people become involved in experimenting with drugs when they are out of it on alcohol. They may not otherwise have ever gone there in the first place. We all know that alcohol lowers inhibitions and people are more likely to do things that they would not do if they were in full possession of their faculties.

The use of art was not just a coincidence. Part of what goes on in the stabilisation programme is using art to connect with people. It is amazing. I often think that more counselling goes on with a key worker sitting beside someone who has drawn a picture and talking to them than might be the case in a formal counselling session. Therefore, we are very interested in developing the medium of bringing young people out to express themselves. As other speakers have said, many substance misusers have low self-esteem. It goes with the vista; it is part of the territory.

I do not have any statistics on underage drinking. However, I know from talking

to  
gardaí — we work very closely with the gardaí in Wexford — that the drug that causes them the most trouble on any given weekend in Wexford is not heroin or cocaine, but alcohol. That is what preoccupies their officers on most nights. On the effort that we make in relation to underage drinking, within the partnership there is another project called ‘Connecting You’, which is a sort of signposting project for young people in trouble. We make use of that in trying to ensure that there is early intervention for people who seem to be having problems with substance misuse. However, I just need to clarify that we are primarily a treatment and rehabilitation project and we leave education and prevention to other colleagues working in the field. As Minister Carey said this morning, the national drug strategy team has different pillars, and we are quite content to try to do the treatment and rehabilitation one quite well. That does not mean that we do not have education and prevention measures ourselves, but we tend to concentrate primarily on treatment and rehabilitation. I hope that that does justice to your questions.

**The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Peter Hain MP):** That was very good indeed and I am grateful to you and your colleagues for responding so fully to all of the points raised. On behalf of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, I wish you all the best with the work that you are doing. Please keep in touch. Could we please show our appreciation, colleagues? [*Applause.*]

Before we conclude, I remind everybody that Minister Martin Cullen is coming at 4.00 pm. We have not been all that hot on timekeeping so, given that we are breaking for tea and coffee now, I would be grateful if everybody could come back promptly at 4.00 pm. Thank you.

*The sitting was suspended at 3.26 pm.*

*The sitting was resumed at 4.08 pm.*

**ADDRESS BY MR MARTIN CULLEN TD,  
MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AND FAMILY AFFAIRS**

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** Order. The Body is now back in public session.

The second item on today’s agenda is an address by the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mr Martin Cullen TD, and we are delighted that he has been able to come to this meeting. Mr Cullen, who represents the constituency of Waterford

in the neighbouring county, has served in a number of ministries, and today he will represent the Government in giving the address and taking questions.

As we all know, the Taoiseach has given this address at many of the plenaries in Ireland. We realise that you will not have the same brief, Minister, but I hope that you can do your best with Members' questions.

I should point out that the Minister is in some distress — he has had painkilling injections in the past hour — so I hope to keep this item as close to an hour as possible. If we take less than an hour, that would be all the better. We thank you for addressing the Body, Minister, even though we know that you are not in good shape.

**The Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr Martin Cullen TD):** Thank you for the warm welcome. I am delighted to meet everyone, particularly Peter Hain and the co-chairmen of the Body. Indeed, I am very honoured to be here, particularly as I come from the neighbouring county of Waterford in the south-east.

I apologise for looking slightly dishevelled. Like all politicians, I can bear pain, but what has happened has made me very nauseous and I feel horribly seasick and dizzy. However, if Members bear with me, we will get through the session.

Members do not need me to tell them this, but this Body continues to play a vital role in developing and fostering mutual understanding between the peoples of these islands. As we all know, if we put politicians in a room together, they will talk to each other and find some common ground, even if they do not always agree with one another's ideologies or party positions.

By providing a forum for parliamentarians on these islands to meet and discuss matters of common interest, the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body has played a significant part in the regeneration and modernisation of the relationship between our two Governments. In a time of big political changes throughout the islands, it is all the more important that our relationships are strong and working well. The Body plays a very significant role in that respect.

Relations between Ireland and Britain are undoubtedly stronger today than they have ever been. Our dialogues and interactions were once dominated by words such as "conflict", "violence" and "division"; now we speak of the broader partnerships of common interest between these islands.

We are working together as partners on the world stage in multilateral fora such as the United Nations and the European Union, where we share a commitment to democracy, human rights and international development. Perhaps the biggest challenges that face both our nations are global; no one region or country alone can tackle complex issues such as climate change, international terrorism and maintaining a vibrant global economy. Such issues are part of a new agenda that challenges us to find new ways of working together — which is, indeed, what we are doing.

A keystone of our relationship has long been the two-way economic partnership of trade and investment, people and innovation. For example, Britain is Ireland's largest trading partner and our third-largest source of investment, while Ireland is Britain's fourth-largest export market and Britain's largest market for food, clothing and footwear.

We cannot speak of partnerships between these islands without mentioning our partnership of people. No two nations and peoples have closer historical and geographical ties. Today 800,000 Irish-born people live in Britain, and an estimated 5.5 million people are second- and third-generation Irish. Many of them were forced to emigrate out of economic hardship and necessity. Although many have gone on to attain new levels of success in their new country, many more remain vulnerable, so reaching out to that vulnerable community has been a key component of Government policy in recent years. For example, in 2007, almost €11.5 million was granted to organisations in Britain that are engaged in delivering services to Irish emigrants. I know that last year Committee D of this Body, led by Lord Dubs, carried out some valuable work on this important issue.

The full extent of our comprehensive partnership extends across numerous other areas, including culture, sport, the arts and literature. In all those areas, our contacts are not alien to our history but are built on it.

The Taoiseach's address last May to the joint Houses of Parliament in Westminster is a potent symbol of how our relationship has evolved in recent times—indeed, the

changing emphasis of this Body's work bears witness to those changes. The Body itself has changed and adapted in recent years to reflect the new complexity of relationships on these islands, and was enlarged in 2001 to welcome Members from the devolved Administrations. Where once the Body's deliberations were dominated by Northern Ireland issues and the quest for a political solution, it is now examining practical matters of mutual co-operation such as tourism, drug abuse and climate change.

*4.15 pm*

It is not just the relationship between our two islands that has changed dramatically. Our relationship with the Unionist community on this island has also been transformed. Commemorations such as those that were held in Dublin for the 90th anniversaries of both the Easter rising and the Battle of the Somme showed that we could come together to honour the different traditions and sacrifices of our shared past.

Next week the Taoiseach and First Minister Paisley will officially open a visitors' centre at the site of the Battle of the Boyne — almost one year after their historic meeting there. There can be no more powerful a symbol of our new-found friendship and mature relationship than that.

I know that the Body is also working hard to develop such a dialogue with the Unionist parties in the North, with a view to establishing an inclusive east-west parliamentary framework, as envisaged in the St Andrews Agreement. I welcome that and encourage you in your work. The Irish Government strongly supports that proposal. It is vital that all traditions and all shades of political opinion both on this island and between these islands can come together to engage with each other on issues that matter to all our people. In doing that, we can help build a prosperous and inclusive society on these islands.

The Government is also strongly supportive of the establishment of the North/South parliamentary forum that was envisaged in the Good Friday Agreement. There have been positive preliminary discussions in recent months between the Oireachtas and the Northern Ireland Assembly on the matter, as well as a number of visits involving

elected representatives of all shades of opinion. Ten years ago this month, we reached a watershed in our history with the negotiation of the Good Friday Agreement. It is perhaps appropriate and timely to reflect on what has been achieved since that historic day. At the outset I echo the comments of many others in paying tribute to the vision and leadership of successive Irish and British Governments; to the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern; to former Prime Minister Tony Blair; and to successive Taoisigh and Prime Ministers before them who worked so hard through the years to find a political solution and to lay the foundations for a political settlement. I acknowledge the dedication and courage of the leaders of Northern Ireland's political parties, who had to make difficult choices and bring their people with them into a new era for Northern Ireland.

The support of our friends in the United States — Senator George Mitchell, who chaired the talks, former President Clinton, President Bush and representatives from both sides of the aisle in Congress — has been critical. On Wednesday, the Taoiseach will have the rare honour of addressing a joint sitting of both Houses of Congress when he will have the opportunity to reflect further on the valuable contribution of the United States to peace on the island.

Nor must we forget the European Union's generous support — moral and financial — for the cause of building peace and reconciliation on the island through the years. The establishment by the European Commission of a task force on Northern Ireland that reported recently, and the formal launch of the new Peace and Interreg programmes are further evidence of the ongoing commitment of the European Union to the process of peace and reconciliation on the island.

It is extraordinary to consider what has been achieved in the past year alone. When the Body last met in Ireland — in March last year — elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly had not yet taken place, nor had an Executive been formed. The North/South Ministerial Council remained suspended. We stood at a point of reckoning in the political process, hoping for — but not yet certain of — progress. Progress did come, thanks to the efforts of all parties. The inclusive power-sharing institutions in Northern Ireland — the Assembly and the Executive — are now up and running, and dealing with the bread-and-butter issues that matter to people. The Northern Ireland Executive has agreed a programme for Government, a budget and an investment strategy. The North/South Ministerial Council has met and is up and running again. The British-Irish Council, now with the Northern Ireland Executive back at the table, is reinvigorating its work on co-operation between all the

Administrations on these islands.

The Taoiseach hosted a summit meeting of the British-Irish Council in Dublin on 14

February, at which there was genuine engagement and debate on matters of relevance to all our Administrations. A particular focus of the discussion was misuse of drugs, which the Body discussed today in the company of my colleague, Minister Pat Carey. The British-Irish Council provides a valuable forum for Members of all the

Administrations on these islands to come together to discuss, and co-operate on, matters of common interest. We look forward to further developing its work, particularly following the strategic review of the Council that is now under way.

Since the restoration of the institutions, we have entered a new era in North/South cooperation. Last July, for the first time in more than five years, Ministers from North and South met to discuss matters of mutual interest on a wide range of areas of common interest. Agreement was reached on an infrastructure package, with more than €580 million of Irish Government investment in a cross-border roads

programme. It was also agreed to proceed with restoration of a section of the Ulster

Canal, which will bring economic and tourism benefits to people on both sides of the border.

Since then, we have had 14 North-South ministerial meetings on different policy sectors, ranging from health and education to transport and tourism. A second plenary meeting of the NSMC took place in Dundalk in February, when we discussed issues affecting our all-island economy, reviewed progress across a wide range of sectors and discussed a shared approach to child protection on the island. Planning for further sectoral meetings of the NSMC is well under way.

The North/South bodies that were established under the Good Friday Agreement are

engaged in their important work of promoting trade and business on the island, managing our lakes and waterways, promoting food safety and our languages and

boosting tourism. Hugh Friel, the recently appointed chairman of Tourism Ireland,

which is one of the most highly respected and effective of those bodies, addressed

this conference earlier today. I am sure he spoke about the huge opportunities that

exist for promoting the island overseas. The importance of tourism to the economy of this island cannot be underestimated. Conscious of its importance, we will have a

substantive discussion on tourism at the next plenary meeting of the NSMC.

Ultimately, we share a small island in an increasingly globalised and competitive

world. If we are to compete, we must work together on a practical level for our mutual benefit. Last November saw the launch of a single electricity market on the island. Earlier this year, a new cross-border innovation fund was announced, to which the Irish Government is contributing €60 million.

We are examining other crucial economic issues, such as skills development, which will be the subject of a major conference later this year, and co-operative spatial planning. The recent announcement by the Tánaiste, Brian Cowen, and the Northern Ireland Minister of Finance and Personnel, Peter Robinson, about co-operation in the financial services area, is a positive development in economic terms for both North and South. The Government is working with the Northern Ireland Executive on a new integrated cross-border approach to development of the north-west of the island, through the north-west gateway initiative.

A vibrant and dynamic island economy will not only enable us to compete better internationally; it will make Ireland an attractive venue for foreign investment. We have been working with the Northern Ireland Executive and the United States of America's Administration to help ensure that next week's US investment conference in Northern Ireland is a success. Both the Irish and British Governments have committed to participating at a high level in the investment conference.

It is clear that we have made immense progress since signature of the Good Friday Agreement 10 years ago. However, some crucial work remains to be done. The establishment of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, which was widely accepted across the community, is a major achievement of the agreement. It was a difficult task, which necessitated considerable political courage and conviction. Since the conclusion of the St Andrews Agreement, there have been further steps forward on policing and justice issues. With the participation of Sinn Féin on the Policing Board and the district policing partnerships, all-party support for the policing and criminal justice institutions is in place.

The St Andrews Agreement stated clearly that the implementation of its provisions:

*"should be sufficient to build the community confidence necessary for the Assembly*

*to request the devolution of criminal justice and policing from the British Government by May 2008."*

The Taoiseach and Prime Minister Brown have made it clear that they consider that the time is right to proceed with devolution of policing and justice, as agreed in St Andrews.

This final stage of devolution is an important further step in consolidating the advances of the past decade, but it is also of vital importance to communities in Northern Ireland. It will demonstrate that their political leaders take responsibility for public safety and tackling crime. That is an essential task of a stable and fully functioning government and is key to securing the confidence of international investors.

A number of other steps must be taken if we are to fulfil the ambition of the Agreement to:

*"strive in every practical way towards reconciliation and rapprochement".*

Combating sectarianism and promoting reconciliation are onerous long-term tasks that we must grapple with if we are to maintain a durable peace and move toward a prosperous future. While leadership on this issue must come from the Northern Ireland Executive and the local communities involved, the Irish Government is playing its own small part through a dedicated anti-sectarianism fund, which is included in the Programme for Government and which was recently launched, as you will know, by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Dermot Ahern TD.

The purpose of the anti-sectarianism fund is to assist local efforts that are aimed at tackling sectarianism, supporting projects in communities and seeking new and more effective ways of addressing sectarianism and division in society. In addition to this, while Loyalist paramilitary groups have begun the process of transformation, they have not yet decommissioned. The Government remains committed to helping Loyalist communities to move beyond the conflict of the past to share in the prosperity that accompanies peace.

In a post-conflict society, dealing with the hurt and division that is part of conflict's legacy is difficult and, at times, divisive. Robin Eames, Denis Bradley and the other members of the consultative group need to use all their experience and judgment

as  
they take forward their challenging and important work. It will take time and it  
will  
not be easy to heal decades of division and the deep scars that have been left by  
loss  
of life and limb, but on this island we now have the opportunity to lay the  
foundations of a peaceful, prosperous and inclusive society for future  
generations. The best response to the tragedies of the Troubles is to make them  
forever a thing of the past.

We therefore have some distance to go before all the aspirations of the Good  
Friday  
Agreement are achieved, and there will inevitably be twists and turns on the  
road  
ahead, but many landmarks and milestones have already been passed, and we  
are all  
heading in the right direction.

We have entered a new realm on these islands; an era of new politics and new  
realities, and of stronger and deeper friendships based on trust and co-operation,  
respect and maturity. We must continue to build on that. As Henry Ford once  
said:

*“Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is  
success.”*

Our challenge now is to work together to build a brighter future for all our  
people.  
Thank you all very much indeed.

## **ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** Thank you very much, Minister. We  
will  
now take oral questions. I note that there are six questions for which Members  
are  
absent; replies will be sent to the respective Members. Some questions will be  
taken  
together, and we will let Members know when we get to them.

### **Tourism, Heritage and Culture**

**2 Dr Dai Lloyd AM** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs how the Irish  
Government is working with the Welsh Assembly to encourage joint working on  
tourism, heritage and culture.

**The Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr Martin Cullen TD):** A range of  
contacts is in place to support informal co-operation between the tourism  
agencies,

cultural and heritage institutions, and the arts councils in both jurisdictions. The Irish Government and the National Assembly for Wales of course support those bodies. I will mention just a couple of examples of that practical co-operation.

Tourism is one of the work areas of the British-Irish Council, in which the Irish Government, the Welsh Assembly Government and representatives of the other member Administrations work together on matters of mutual interest. Tourism Ireland, the agency that is responsible for promoting the island of Ireland as a holiday destination overseas, enjoys a close working relationship with VisitBritain. I welcome the fact that the two agencies have engaged in co-operative marketing campaigns that promote travel to Ireland and Wales. For example, over the past two years, Tourism Ireland has worked closely with VisitBritain to promote the Zoom Airlines service from Toronto and Vancouver to Belfast, which travels on to Cardiff. The agencies are also undertaking co-operative marketing campaigns in Australia and the USA.

In culture and heritage, there are a variety of professional contacts between cultural institutions in both jurisdictions. Those contacts are generally of an individual nature and are not part of a specific initiative or programme. The Arts Council of Ireland, which is funded by the Department of Arts, Tourism and Sport, has held regular meetings with the arts councils in the UK, including the Arts Council of Wales.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** I ask Members to keep their supplementary questions as brief as possible.

*4.30 pm*

**Dr Dai Lloyd AM:** Diolch yn fawr, Gyd-gadeirydd. Thank you, Co-Chairman.

I thank the Minister for his full and comprehensive answer. I wish to pursue one aspect of tourism — cultural tourism, which is the new thrust for us in Wales. With 600,000 people in Wales speaking Welsh every day and a similar number having some knowledge of the language, Wales's unique selling point is its language, culture and heritage. Similar considerations obviously apply here in the Republic of Ireland. I would like to push the Minister further on how the Governments in Ireland and Wales are working together to push forward the agenda of cultural tourism.

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** There is no doubt that cultural tourism has expanded to become a substantial product. Some years ago, it was hard to define, but it has become much clearer in people's minds. Dr Lloyd is right to highlight the Welsh language. His point applies, to some degree, to the Irish language — we are

somewhat jealous of Wales's success in that regard. I took part recently in a discussion about some of Wales's achievements in increasing use of the Welsh language.

In the Cabinet, working through the agencies, we want to see Celtic connectivity —  
—  
in the broadest sense — that extends worldwide. We want to be connected in a real way, by having our peoples visit each other's countries and having people come to both Wales and Ireland. Through joint promotion, we can co-operate to capture markets that we could not capture on our own. If people have to travel some distance to get to Wales or Ireland, they can make a better trip of it by going to both islands, which gives them more reason to come. We have proposed that approach, which should be worked on here or through the agencies. There are many positive possibilities.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** Jim O'Keeffe is not here to ask question

3. I propose to take together question 14, from Alex Attwood, and question 19, from Arthur Morgan, which are similar to question 3.

### **Policing and Justice Powers (Devolution)**

14 **Mr Alex Attwood MLA** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if the Governments believe the conditions exist for the devolution of justice powers and if the Governments believe there are further actions that parties or other organisations should take to deepen political confidence.

19 **Mr Arthur Morgan TD** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs to outline the terms of transfer for policing and justice to the Northern Ireland Assembly as agreed under the St Andrews Agreement; if the Minister agrees the urgent necessity for transfer of these powers; and if he accepts that such a transfer would enhance democratic accountability and public confidence.

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** The St Andrews Agreement stated clearly that the implementation of its provisions should be sufficient to build the community confidence that is necessary for the Assembly to request the devolution of criminal justice and policing from the British Government by May this year. We have seen the implementation of that agreement and there is now all-party support for devolution of the institutions of policing and criminal justice. We have the full participation of Sinn Féin, the Policing Board and the district policing partnerships. The Governments are therefore of the view that all the conditions

now exist for the devolution of policing and justice to take place successfully at the request of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The report of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, which was endorsed by the Northern Ireland Assembly, called on the parties to commit to further discussion to find consensus on timing and the practical arrangements that are necessary for devolution to take place. It is important that those discussions are progressed as a priority by the parties.

We believe that the early transfer of the powers will further consolidate the institutions of policing and criminal justice in Northern Ireland. Equally important, it will build public confidence and send a signal to the international investment community — as we all know, a substantial forum on that subject is coming up— on the long-term stability of all the political arrangements. It is very much a win-win situation across the spectrum.

**Mr Arthur Morgan TD:** I acknowledge the public utterances by all Government spokespersons in recent times that have called for the devolution of policing and justice powers to the Assembly as soon as possible. The commitment that was agreed in the St Andrews Agreement by all the parties and the two Governments, which makes it an internationally binding agreement between those parties, was that the devolution would occur by May this year. Minister, I accept the bona fide nature of the public utterances of the Government, but what practical measures is the Government taking to ensure that the agreement is honoured by the parties who signed up to it?

**Mr Seymour Crawford TD:** Unfortunately, Jim O’Keefe has the same problem as the Minister — his back has gone and he was unable to make it here today. It feels a bit strange that Jim O’Keefe and Arthur Morgan are being linked together — that just shows how far we have come.

The most important thing is to get this right. With the change of leadership in the DUP and the change of First Minister, there may be some delay, but we should not allow that to become an excuse to delay the devolution of these powers indefinitely. I urge the Minister to take whatever steps he can to bring that forward.

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** As I have said — and both Members have repeated it in their questions, to some degree — the issue is extremely important to everybody. There has been a lot of discussion and painstaking effort over a period of time to get to

the point at which we believe the conditions are right. I believe that the confidence and the demand exist in the communities on both sides for the political leaders to take the lead on this as they have on education, health and everything else.

Many powers are already devolved to the Policing Board and we should not lose sight of the fact that a strong basis already exists, although the final major steps need to be taken. I take the wider view that the process must be considered in the context of the hugely powerful and important message that it will send out internationally, providing further confirmation of political stability and economic and social development in Northern Ireland. No one should underestimate the importance of the devolution of these powers in achieving that.

From the Government's point of view — and, I think, from that of all the participants — the circumstances are now right for that devolution and we should be in a position to move it forward. As I have said, it is primarily a matter for people within Northern Ireland, but we and others are working to build the confidence to allow that step to be taken, and the sooner the better. It is a win-win situation all round.

### **All-island Economy**

**4 Dr Alasdair McDonnell MLA** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs what plans the Irish Government has to assist the further development of an all-island economy, and specifically if meaningful progress is being made on an all-island energy market or an all-island telecommunications market.

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** The Irish Government is committed to working in partnership with the Northern Ireland Executive to implement all-island initiatives where there is mutual economic benefit. The Government's national development plan sets out a comprehensive overview of all-island co-operation and includes proposals for considerable investment, some of which I have already highlighted, in new North/South projects.

The Government is committed to pursuing, throughout the life of the plan, cooperative measures to address common challenges, such as the need to grow employment rates; to enhance skill levels, which is crucial as we move up the value chain in the global economy; to foster research and innovation, which speaks for itself; and to build a world-class infrastructure. Significant progress is being made on the development of an all-island energy market, which we all want to see. The energy challenge to all of us worldwide is very significant and we on this island

must be ready to meet it.

The single electricity market was successfully launched last November and there are plans to improve the physical infrastructure through a new cross-border interconnector link. Common arrangements for gas on the island are also being considered. A strong focus on co-operation in sustainable energy is based on the recently published all-island grid study, which addresses the technical and economic issues in accommodating wind and other renewables generation in the network. The two Departments continue to explore the possibilities of developing joint initiatives for the promotion of energy efficiency on an all-island basis.

Progress has been made on specific telecommunications issues, such as cross-border mobile phone roaming and an all-Ireland spectrum licence. There is on-going cooperation between the two regulators on a range of issues. Both Governments and regulators will continue to work together when there are justified and appropriate opportunities for co-operation in the telecommunications sector. As I said, the Government will continue to pursue further economic collaboration with the Northern Ireland Executive, including through the North/South Ministerial Council. We will be represented at the highest level at next week's US investment conference in Belfast, which is of enormous significance.

**Dr Alasdair McDonnell MLA:** How soon does the Minister see a situation being reached where people could easily cross the border in each direction to seek medical care? In other words, how soon will health services, particularly secondary care, on each side of the border be openly accessible?

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** You have hit on a subject that is currently a major topic of discussion here. If we consider health services in the north-west of the island, it is blindingly obvious that the answer is maximisation of investment in centres of excellence on one side of the border or the other—it does not matter which—that can service a very good population base. I know from the discussions that we have had at Cabinet and from the general debate about health that that is the way that we want to go. That is just a microcosm.

For the population base that we have between the North and the South of the island, it makes absolute sense that, if we do what all the experts are telling us to do, which is to have a network of centres of excellence, it should be an all-island network. Medical developments and the crossover of medical understanding and learning happen in an integrated way all the time. An artificial divide serves

nobody—neither the patient nor the medical practitioner. We are keen to see such a network develop. There is already cross-border co-operation between many people in the different colleges North and South in nursing and in training. Such co-operation will bring its own contact and will develop in its own natural way.

### **Trafficking of Women and Children**

**6 Mrs Joyce Watson AM** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs what work is being carried out by the anti-human trafficking unit, particularly cross-border work with authorities in Wales, to act on and prevent the trafficking of women and children.

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** The anti-human trafficking unit was established in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform on 1 February this year. Bilateral co-operation exists at the highest level between the United Kingdom and Irish authorities on the issue of human trafficking. Officials meet approximately once per month to share and exchange best practice, so the co-operation takes place at quite a high level.

The UK human trafficking centre is assisting in delivering training in the recognition and investigation of such trafficking for front-line gardaí as well as for officers of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Both services are receiving the training and experience that is available and they are also undertaking joint training courses.

We are also actively co-operating in the context of the European G6 initiative against human trafficking. As Members will know, that initiative, which involves six European states — Ireland, the UK, Poland, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain — aims to ensure that the European Union becomes a more hostile environment for criminals who engage in the trafficking of human beings.

We are ready to work with all the relevant authorities on these islands and beyond to combat human trafficking, which we all agree is a heinous crime. I understand that we have already had a specific instance of contact and co-operation with the Welsh Assembly Government.

*4.45 pm*

**Mrs Joyce Watson AM:** I thank the Minister for that answer and I congratulate him on the forward thinking in the appointment that was made earlier this year.

The Welsh Assembly Government's consultation document "Safeguarding Children who may have been Trafficked", which was published in 2007, found that trafficked children are increasingly being brought into Wales by ferry from Ireland. The report stated that, as traffickers are finding it more difficult to traffic children into Britain through the classic routes — by ferry from France and through the larger London airports — they are looking for other points of entry. That point was reiterated in July 2007, when a BBC programme highlighted how the Republic of Ireland is being used as a country of transit and destination and, in particular, as a gateway for smuggling children from Bulgaria into Britain. The Irish Refugee Council has argued that the Government should make provision for a social worker to be based at the points of entry — that is, at Dublin airport and the Rosslare ferry — to identify vulnerable children. Has any further consideration been given to that recommendation?

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** The Member raises an issue that is extremely important, as are all such suggestions of trafficking. From an Irish perspective, if there is a serious problem, we want to get to the bottom of it.

The reality is that it is hard to know about such matters because many of the people involved do not come forward so we are dealing with what is, to a degree, anecdotal evidence. Since the BBC programme was broadcast, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform has been in contact with the BBC, but it has not been able to produce concrete evidence other than the one trafficker who made the allegation.

However, I agree that, on such a substantial international issue, the proximity of our two islands and the relationships between them require us to work together if we are to begin to crack down on and end this heinous practice. Given that regular monthly meetings are taking place, I think that such working together will provide the best outcome. We already share information with authorities elsewhere in these islands — as they do with us — to try to track these matters so that we can come to the solution that we all want, which is to end the practice.

**Pat Finucane**

**7 The Lord Dubs** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs what discussions

the Irish Government has had with the British Government regarding an inquiry into the death of Pat Finucane.

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** The Government has recently raised the murder of Pat Finucane with the British authorities. In our ongoing discussions with the British Government, we have made it clear that we wish to see adherence to the standards that were agreed by the two Governments at Weston Park in 2001 and as set out by Judge Cory — namely, that an inquiry would be conducted pursuant to the Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) Act 1921.

The Government fully understands and shares the family's concerns about the Inquiries Act 2005 under which the British Government proposed to hold an inquiry.

We continued to make that position clear to the British Government in our bilateral meetings and the Taoiseach raised it recently with Secretary of State Woodward when they met in Dublin on 3 April 2008.

The Taoiseach met members of the Finucane family on Thursday 24 April 2008 to discuss recent correspondence received by the family from the Northern Ireland Office, which indicated that its preparations for an inquiry had ceased in autumn 2006. At that meeting, the Taoiseach reiterated the Government's continuing support for a public inquiry into Pat's murder. That position has full, all-party support in Dáil Éireann.

Ireland has also raised the case at appropriate international fora, including the United Nations and the Council of Europe, and we will continue to do so. The Government will remain in close touch with the Finucane family as we follow developments in this case.

**The Lord Dubs:** I thank the Minister for as full an answer as I have heard from any Minister in any jurisdiction. It is so helpful that I think that all my supplementary questions have been answered.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** Thank you, Alf; you are most helpful yourself. I will take questions 8 and 17 together, if that is all right with Seymour Crawford and Dr Rory O'Hanlon.

### **Paul Quinn**

8 **Mr Seymour Crawford TD** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs what progress has been made between the Garda and Police Service of Northern

Ireland

regarding the investigation into the savage murder of Paul Quinn; whether he is satisfied that the Authorities are getting the co-operation that they might expect; and whether he will make a statement on the matter.

**17 Dr Rory O'Hanlon TD** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, in the light of the Paul Quinn murder, what progress has been made in restoring normal policing to South Armagh.

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** I take this opportunity to condemn utterly the brutal murder of Paul Quinn, as I am sure we all would. It is important to note that this awful crime has been condemned across the board and that political representatives from every party have called for full co-operation with the gardaí and PSNI in their investigations. The Taoiseach, the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Minister for Foreign Affairs have each met with Paul Quinn's parents and assured them of the Government's determination that everything possible is being done to bring the killers to justice.

A very active Garda investigation is ongoing and clearly we should be careful not to do or say anything to undermine that investigation. I can say that the level of cooperation between the gardaí and the PSNI on the investigation is extremely high, and has included Garda officers travelling to interview individuals in the North in the company of PSNI officers.

**Mr Seymour Crawford TD:** I welcome the Minister's speech and concur with him on our great satisfaction about the fact that the gardaí and the PSNI have been working so closely together. I also appreciate the delicacy of the situation as I have dealt with the family, as has my party leader. However, at this stage, with so many people involved and knowing some of the situation, is it not disappointing that no one has come forward yet? Does that not indicate some degree of fear and anxiety among those who might know? We still have some way to go to remove that type of fear in that region.

**Dr Rory O'Hanlon TD:** As Members know, the Quinn murder took place south of the border. The investigation was conducted north and south of the border. I endorse what the Minister said because we recognise and appreciate the unprecedented high level of co-operation between the PSNI and the gardaí. In

light of that co-operation, have there been any other developments to ensure that we capitalise on that cooperation and see normality restored to South Armagh?

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** I acknowledge what both Deputies have said. Clearly, cooperation between the PSNI and the gardaí is ongoing at the very highest level. I do not like to use words such as “disappointment” and “frustration” but, although we have not reached the point of laying charges that I am sure everyone would welcome, that does not for one minute suggest that co-operation between the two authorities has not been of the highest level and quality, because it has been and that will continue to be the case.

Rory O’Hanlon is right to suggest that a resolution would be extremely positive for South Armagh and Northern Ireland and, indeed, relationships in general. I have no doubt that the gardaí and the PSNI have been urging everyone who might have some information to come forward, but I do not think that frustration or disappointment has in any way deterred them in their efforts to get an outcome in the case. I am sure that we would all encourage them to continue that level of co-operation.

**Mr Dinny McGinley TD:** I have a brief question on the same subject. I, too, am glad to hear that there is such co-operation between the security forces on both sides of the border in investigating the murder of Paul Quinn.

Can the Minister confirm that investigations are continuing into the murder two years ago, almost to the day, of Denis Donaldson in my constituency and the murder six weeks ago of a young Strabane man, which also took place on our side of the border, in Castlefin in Donegal, and that the same co-operation exists for those investigations? I hope that those cases are being pursued, because what happened in our area is extremely serious. Does the Minister have any information on whether progress has been made in investigating those two murders?

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** With regard to the Paul Quinn case, Dinny McGinley’s interpretation of what I said is right — a very high-level investigation involving the gardaí and PSNI officers is taking place. I do not want to go beyond that at this stage, because I do not want to say anything that might undermine the process that is under way. That investigation is certainly ongoing.

With regard to the other cases that Dinny McGinley raised, I do not have specific information in front of me, but I can say with some confidence that there is no doubt

that there is tremendous co-operation between the PSNI and the gardaí in all cases, on a range of issues. I can say with confidence that on any issue on which assistance is needed from the other side, such assistance is forthcoming. I cannot provide an update, but I can certainly say that whatever co-operation is necessary is available.

### **Sellafield**

**9 Hon Stephen Rodan MHK** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, in view of the shared concerns of the Isle of Man Government and the Irish Government with regard to the nuclear plant at Sellafield, if he will confirm that the Government will work closely with the Isle of Man Government to voice those concerns to the United Kingdom Government, in particular in the context of the British-Irish Council Environment Group, in order to (a) complete the work already begun on a joint paper on Sellafield issues concerning the safety, security and environmental impact of the installation; (b) halt all fuel reprocessing and manufacturing; and (c) promote the ultimate closure of the plant.

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** Ireland and the Isle of Man have shared concerns about the nuclear reprocessing plant at Sellafield. Our programme for government states that Ireland will continue to bring political, diplomatic and legal pressure to bear on the UK, with a view to securing the safe decommissioning of all nuclear reprocessing facilities at Sellafield.

Ireland has worked closely with the Isle of Man to voice those concerns to the UK Government, in particular in the context of the British-Irish Council. At the London summit in 2006, the Irish Government outlined its continuing concerns about Sellafield and nuclear safety in general, but acknowledged that co-operation between Britain and Ireland on nuclear safety matters had recently improved.

In the context of the BIC, although the Government of Ireland and the Isle of Man completed a joint discussion paper on Sellafield and radioactive waste in 2002, it has not yet been the subject of substantive discussion because of certain legal issues, which I understand have now been resolved. Officials from the Irish and Manx Governments are working on a revised joint discussion paper, which will address the safety of current operations at Sellafield, the final disposal of radioactive waste and the control of environmental discharges. I believe that it will be presented at the earliest possible date.

**Hon Stephen Rodan MHK:** I thank the Minister for his helpful reply. Is he aware

that, although the Nuclear Decommissioning Agency has set certain targets for Sellafield, the decommissioning target for the Magnox plant of 2012 has recently been moved back to 2016 because of certain operational difficulties? Is the Irish Government confident that the United Kingdom's strict target for close to zero discharges into the Irish Sea by 2020 — a commitment that was given to the OSPAR convention — can be met?

**Mr Alasdair Morgan MSP:** Evidence from analysis of marine organisms shows that emissions from Sellafield have affected the south coast of Scotland on the Solway Firth, around the Mull of Galloway, and up the west coast of Scotland. In any discussions between the Irish Government and the Manx Government, will the Minister consider contacting the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, who I am sure is interested in the matter?

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** As the former Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government, I am familiar with the subject. I spent quite a lot of time on the issue, and was involved in a number of the legal cases. I had direct contact with the then Scottish Minister and the various Parliaments in the two islands on the issue. It comes back to the point about discharges. To use the language of our children, it is a no-brainer. The benefits to the entire population of both islands of ending discharges are so self-evident that they are hardly a debating point. I have tried to make that point in previous discussions and I still hold strongly to that view. I hope that the commitments that have been given are fulfilled. When some of the agreements were put in place, I said that we should attempt even to move ahead of those timeframes because it would be of such enormous benefit to us to have the Irish Sea in the condition that we would all like it to be in for future generations. The sooner we can end discharges into the Irish Sea, the better. It remains a major issue. I will pass on the comment about further contact with our Scottish colleagues. There is a lot of concern in the UK about activities at Sellafield, and about safety and security at the plant.

*5.00 pm*

### **North/South Ministerial Council**

10 **Mr Barry McElduff MLA** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs to provide a progress report on the work of the North/South Ministerial Council.

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** Since restoration of the power-sharing institutions, there have been two plenary meetings of the North/South Ministerial Council and 11 sectoral ministerial meetings. The NSMC has also met twice in institutional format.

Major initiatives agreed to date include a cross-border roads programme, which I referred to earlier, with an Irish contribution of €580 million, which will benefit the north-west of the island; agreement to restoration of the Ulster canal between Clones and Upper Lough Erne; new board appointments for the north-south bodies; and the launch of a cross-border mobility information website. In addition, the NSMC has directed and led the work of the north-south bodies. Important work is being taken forward across the sectors, including an all-island animal health strategy and crossborder co-operation on health services, educational underachievement and common challenges relating to the environment, including water quality and waste management. Planning is also well under way for further meetings of the MLC on all fronts.

**Mr Barry McElduff MLA:** I welcome the emphasis that the Minister placed on North-South co-operation in his speech and in his answer. He referred to the “Obstacles to Cross Border Mobility” report — or to the website, which has been updated. I direct the Minister’s attention to the subject of health.

In question 21, which we might not get to, Dinny McGinley mentions the need for proper cancer services in the north-west. We need to ensure that opportunities in Donegal and Derry are maximised.

I direct the Minister’s attention to another health issue — GP out-of-hours provision in border communities. There are currently two pilot projects — one in Crossmaglen, Keady and Castleblayney and the other in Derry and Inishowen. I ask the Minister to give an assurance that other communities in the border corridor will benefit from a further roll-out of GP out-of-hours provision.

Finally, I ask the Minister to elaborate on the work of the north-west gateway initiative.

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** I do not have detailed information on the roll-out of GP services in front of me, but I take your general point about the roll-out of cooperation. That comes back to an earlier question that one of our colleagues asked in general terms. I have a strong personal view that whatever is good in one part of the island is good in all parts. The real co-operation that we can get will have enormous benefits.

In my former Departments, I was involved in two other initiatives. I note that they are not referenced here, maybe because they were working through the institutions. As Minister for Transport, I was involved in the development of the airport at Derry.

Through our programme, substantial investment was made in the airport. That is not just a win for Derry. It is strategically important on the island that the airport is strong.

I was also involved in the huge investment in the purchase of buses from the Wright Group in Northern Ireland, as you know, when I met Dr Paisley in Ballymena. Purchasing the buses was the right thing to do; it was a win for us all in maintaining employment on the island and building quality.

Real, live, cemented co-operation is taking place at a number of levels. It is not necessarily institutionalised all the time, as important as it is to open doors at the highest level. I begin to get a sense that businesses are seeing opportunities to develop as well. That is the case between tourism businesses, in health, and in many other areas. The winners will be the people on the whole island. The ability of both Administration to maximise the delivery of good quality services will be enhanced.

### **Punishment Beatings**

**11 Mr Michael Ring TD** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs how many punishment beatings have taken place and have been reported to the Police Service of Northern Ireland since 1 January 2008, if any; and if any prosecutions have taken place in relation to these reported punishment beatings.

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** I am advised that, as of 16 March this year, 12 parliamentary-style attacks — sorry, that should be paramilitary-style attacks have been reported to the PSNI. *[Interruption.]* That is what you call a faux pas.

Of those attacks, one was a shooting and 11 were assaults of other kinds. Nine were associated with loyalist paramilitary groups and three with republican paramilitary groups. I am advised that investigations into those cases are ongoing. I note that the Independent Monitoring Commission reported last November that the number of paramilitary shooting casualties is at its lowest level since the IMC was established and that the number of paramilitary assault casualties also continues to fall. We all welcome that.

Deputy Ring will appreciate that I am not in a position to comment in detail on individual prosecution cases in Northern Ireland. However, I take this opportunity to strongly condemn all such attacks. Groups and individuals who still seek to use violence and the threat of it to hold sway over their communities have no place in a civilised society and the perpetrators should be fully prosecuted wherever possible.

**Mr Michael Ring TD:** I thank the Minister for his reply. One punishment in Northern Ireland is too many, so I am glad to hear that we now have fewer than we had for many years. I hope that, by the next time that we meet, many of the people who have taken out punishments will have been prosecuted. I also hope that everyone who is involved in such crimes will stop now that we have the peace process working in Northern Ireland. It is sad that people are still taking the law into their own hands and administering punishments.

I would like us not to be afraid to say that such punishments are still going on. I feel sometimes that there is a section of society that does not obey the law and I do not want such punishments to be swept under the carpet; we should at least let people know what is happening. I am glad that the numbers are falling and I hope that the next time that such a question is put down, there will be none. I encourage people who are involved in the political process to encourage people outside that process to ensure that they report beatings to the police and that they identify the people who are involved because nobody should administer the law themselves in any civilised society.

**Mr Seymour Crawford TD:** I do not want to question the Minister's figures because I believe that they are accurate as he knows them. However, there is certainly reluctance in areas such as South Armagh — I have heard this straight from the horse's mouth — to state that people are still being punished. We must make sure that, as Dr O'Hanlon said earlier, policing is at a proper level and people feel free to advise the police of such happenings.

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** We all want an end to such punishments and they must come to an end. Civilised societies do not have that type of activity. However, given the

long history of such punishments, I have put the facts before the meeting this afternoon. They show a significant drop in the number of punishments and can give us confidence that things are continuing to move in the right direction. Of course, we will not be happy — and rightly so — until that practice has ended completely. We should have the confidence in the efforts that have been made, the reductions that have taken place and that we have everybody's participation in ensuring that we are going in that direction. As I say, I hope that we are not too far away from having zero to report in that regard.

### **Freight Transport Strategy**

15 **Mr Joe McHugh TD** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs to outline what plans are in situ for a joint British-Irish and North-South transport strategy for freight transport in light of both jurisdictions moving further from the EU centre of trade, by virtue of the series of EU extensions that have introduced new member states from Eastern Europe into the EU.

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** The Irish Government recognises that fast, efficient and integrated transport links between Ireland, Northern Ireland and Britain are vital for the sustained economic prosperity of these islands and indeed to facilitate the movement of goods between these islands, the rest of Europe and the world.

The significant roads programme on both sides of the border will make a huge contribution to the efficiencies of freight movement in the island. As Members know, the Government is investing €18 billion in the national roads programme, which will see the inter-urban system completed by 2010. That is very much on schedule and will be of enormous significance to the North/South Ministerial Council.

The Government is providing another €580 million of funding for a major roads investment programme in Northern Ireland to provide dual carriageway as standard on routes between the north-west gateway and the eastern seaboard corridor from Belfast to Larne.

The British-Irish Council summit in Belfast last year discussed the potential for further collaboration in relation to transport planning and investment to strengthen the integration of transport networks across the whole island. The BIC transport subgroup is currently working to advance those recommendations.

The Department of Transport has recently received a report from InterTradeIreland in association with the Joint Business Council, which makes recommendations to improve the overall freight transport system within and beyond the island of Ireland.

The Department is currently actively considering the recommendations in that report.

**Mr Joe McHugh TD:** I asked that question in light of the good work and proposals in the InterTradeIreland report. The reality for the United Kingdom and Ireland is that we are moving further and further away from the centre of Europe and we are becoming less competitive. Those are the challenges. It is a challenge for both Governments to look at the possibility of using sea freight in a more co-ordinated way.

I know that the last thing that the United Kingdom needs to see is all Irish freight coming up the backbone of England instead of coming directly from Rotterdam to Larne. It would not necessarily come direct to Rosslare, as we do not have the necessary infrastructure there to distribute all our goods by road. Incidentally, only 3% of all of our goods are transported by rail. We should be looking at redeveloping our ports, particularly Lisahally in Derry, which is extremely underused.

Minister, how do you see sea freight being deployed in a more realistic and co-ordinated fashion between the two jurisdictions?

**Mr Alasdair Morgan MSP:** I want to ask about a different issue arising from the same question. Obviously, freight from Britain to Ireland is increasing, and a significant amount of it goes along the roads of the south-west of Scotland. With the eastward expansion of the European Union, many eastern European lorry drivers are transporting that freight. Last week, I talked to the police in Dumfries and Galloway and it seems that there is significant evidence of what anyone who drives those roads and sees all the articulated lorries that go off them would already suspect, which is that drivers are being exploited and are being made to work excessive hours. The police are worried that, when they catch the drivers, which is the easy part, they are just sacked and the operator hires someone else. That raises jurisdictional issues, as the operators are not necessarily based in the United Kingdom. What co-operation is there between the Irish Government and the UK Government to try to regulate this area, which involves significant safety issues?

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** I say to Joe McHugh that the ports are the arteries of this

island, and will remain so. Most of our goods are moved off the island of Ireland by sea, and I do not see that changing. I know, because I was in the Department of Transport, that a major report on port development has been completed in the past 18 months. As Joe McHugh knows, we have ensured that ports now have much more of a commercial mandate, which was the right thing to do. Now, people are looking at key pieces of infrastructure in relation to the servicing of the ports, which is the point that Joe McHugh is driving at.

The eastern seaboard, particularly from Larne downwards, has the key sea routes, which are also the fastest sea routes. A lot of the infrastructure development planning in the next 10 years will go hand in glove with port development. For instance, the road access to Rosslare is a disaster, yet the volume of goods that goes through that port is hugely significant. It is planned that the access to Rosslare port will be completely different to what it is at present, as there will be a dual carriageway motorway the whole way. Unquestionably, there will be a motorway going all the way from Rosslare to Larne. We want the kind of infrastructure on the eastern seaboard—as well as the western seaboard—that can cope with the volume of goods that need to be transported. The ports tell me that they are very much up to that challenge.

Mr Morgan's question concerns a more difficult point. A number of EU directives deal with the issues that he raises, which are unquestionably transnational issues.

Obviously, I cannot give Mr Morgan a specific answer about any of the cases that he raised.

When I was in the Department for Transport here and Alistair Darling was in the Department for Transport in Westminster, we had a lot of contact about issues relating to the quality of drivers originating in Ireland and going to the UK or transiting the UK on their way to Europe. Now, as Mr Morgan rightly says, drivers come from all jurisdictions within at least the 27 EU member states and perhaps it is time to look at the legal basis of EU directives that concern specific issues involving drivers. I will certainly pass that point on to my colleague, the Minister for Transport.

### **Emerald Fund**

**16 Mr Eddie McGrady MP** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs to comment on the Emerald Fund and, in particular, details within the fund relating to border areas such as South Down and County Louth.

*5.15 pm*

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** I am aware of the recent announcement by the New York City comptroller, William Thompson, that \$150 million will be committed to a fund that will be used to invest in various projects in Northern Ireland. I understand that the fund, which will be known as the Emerald Investment Development Fund, will draw its funding from four New York City pension funds and that it is the largest ever US public investment in Northern Ireland.

This announcement is, of course, to be welcomed and represents a substantial dividend, as I am sure Eddie McGrady would agree. Coming, as it does, at a time of concern about the current state of the US economy, it is a tremendous vote of confidence in Northern Ireland and demonstrates what is possible and can be achieved internationally. It is also a welcome development in the run-up to next week's US investment conference in Belfast and one that the Irish Government has strongly supported and encouraged through its offices in the US.

**Mr Eddie McGrady MP:** I thank the Minister for a full reply. We have been told to expect that half or more of the \$150 million Emerald Fund will be used to finance projects in Northern Ireland in target sectors such as energy, waste management, water and ports. Given the strategic links with the South of Ireland in those matters and the current undertakings north, south, east and west to enhance those sectors, does the Minister anticipate that his Government will provide financial or advisory help to develop the projects speedily?

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** The answer to that is a definitive yes. In recent discussions on Northern Ireland, the Tánaiste and Minister for Finance and Peter Robinson have talked about the broader principles of investment and trying to work together to enhance the economic benefits to both sides. If we can work with projects to get the resources into them from any investment that comes into the country — in this case, from the US — we will certainly do that. We have no problem with that because there is enormous mutual benefit from such projects. I get a sense that both sides are very much of that mindset. I hope that we will be able to keep that mindset and, if we can, we will be able to expedite the projects fairly quickly.

## Cancer Services

21 **Mr Dinny McGinley TD** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs if he will report on negotiations conducted and any progress made on co-operation between the Health Services in Northern Ireland and the Republic, particularly on the provision of cancer services in the north-west, and if he will make a statement on the matter.

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** Improved cross-border co-operation on cancer services is already under way — we had some reference to it earlier — with patients from Donegal now being able to access radiation oncology services at Belfast City Hospital.

On 15 April last, the Northern Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Michael McGimpsey, announced the provision of a satellite centre linked to Belfast City Hospital, which is to be located in Altnagelvin. It will provide the additional radiotherapy capacity that is needed to meet an anticipated increase in cancer in Northern Ireland and take account of the potential for cross-border co-operation in the development of that resource. My colleague the Minister for Health and Children has welcomed the announcement, and the two Departments will hold further discussions in that regard.

Significant progress has also been made on cancer research with the establishment of the first all-Ireland cancer network and the publication of an all-Ireland cancer incidence report. There is extensive on-going north-south co-operation on health matters, including through working together and initiatives such as the cross-border general practitioner out-of-hours service, which was referred to earlier.

The two Departments of health are working on a comprehensive study on health cooperation and, last November, the two Ministers were presented with an interim report that highlighted co-operation on radiation oncology services and paediatric and congenital cardiac services as areas in which collaboration should be pursued without delay. In 2007, Ministers discussed progress on planning for major emergencies, including the handling of pandemic flu, and reviewed co-operation on accident and emergency services as well.

**Mr Dinny McGinley TD:** I welcome the announcement that we may have radiotherapy in Derry, based in Altnagelvin, to look after the needs of Donegal patients who currently have to travel to Dublin and Galway. The uptake of the Belfast offer has been limited; it is less than 10 since it was started about a year ago. I suppose that the great difficulty that we have north of the Dublin-Galway line is that there is no centre of excellence in the state. We appreciate whatever is going to be available and what is available in Northern Ireland.

If I may say so, I know that the Minister's constituency has been very successful in carving out a centre of excellence here in the south-east. I suppose that the ideal solution would be that there would be such a centre north of a Dublin-Galway line.

Do we have to wait until 2015 before anything concrete is established or is there any

chance that it could be fast-tracked to save people leaving their homes in Donegal for seven, eight, nine or 10 weeks to get radium treatment in Dublin?

We would

appreciate anything that could be done to fast-track the decision that has already been made.

**Senator Cecilia Keaveney:** I wanted to throw in a question in relation to this issue,

which is important in our region. In the North, they always fought between the words. There was always an important differentiation between the words used.

We talk about access to Belfast and buying-in part of the service there. I suppose that what people are asking about is equality of access and equity issues. On the announcement on Altnagelvin, can the Minister indicate that equality of access or equality of right of access will be at the forefront of cross-border co-operation?

The last thing that people need is to feel that they are being accommodated at the end of somebody else's list, even though we are giving our financial contribution to that. Has the Minister any notes in relation to the private hospital that was begun in Letterkenny last Friday and how it will impact on cancer treatment delivery in the north-west?

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** The point is true on both fronts. You are talking about equality of access to quality services. That is the root of what we are all trying to achieve in health, not just in this country but in the UK and throughout Europe. I am

no expert, but my view is that cancer is almost the plague of our generation in terms

of the toll that it takes on society in many different ways. The challenge is significant.

Clearly, as I understand it, the best way of dealing with these issues is through centres of excellence, where quality people do a high volume of work, and where training and research take place. Unfortunately, I worry — I make this point as an individual as opposed to anything else — that we have created a false debate between the private sector and public sector. My personal view is that they should be working in cooperation with each other. They both have a lot to offer. I worry that we are creating an artificial divide in people's minds, particularly in patients' minds, which I think is undermining the generality of health delivery. The bottom line for me is that whether someone is a public patient or a private patient, they should have access to all the services. That is the reality. There is no doubt that in a lot of new private hospitals, that access and equality of access is available. Perhaps I am getting into territory that I should not be getting into, but I firmly believe that we need to move on beyond what I think is a spurious argument to some degree and look at very good examples of real co-operation

and fundamental sharing of expertise and facilities between the public and the private sectors. That is a theoretical argument.

From the patient's point of view, that argument does not exist any more in some places, and it does not need to exist if the right delivery structure is in place.

Some of

the solutions in the north-west can provide that and I have seen it here in the southeast, with cancer services and radiation treatment being provided between the private and public sectors. Some of the arguments used to drive me mad because I could not accept some of the stupidity from both sides, or the protectionism in the medical sector, with politicians and everyone getting involved. However, my view is that it is possible to have quality services and equality of access, if the willingness is there.

### **Drugs Trade**

**22 Mr Charlie O'Connor TD** asked the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, in the light of the common threat to the people of these islands from the scourge of drug abuse, if he would outline possible areas of greater co-operation between the Administrations in combating the illicit drug trade.

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** There is significant ongoing co-operation between the gardaí and police forces in the other jurisdictions to counter the illegal drugs trade. The gardaí have attributed much of the recent increased volume of seizures in Ireland to a successful intelligence-led approach, nationally and internationally. That has resulted in significant joint operations between the jurisdictions. The need for greater cooperation by police forces is kept under on-going review by the relevant authorities.

There has also been significant co-operation between the Administrations over the past years through the framework of the British-Irish Council, in which Ireland leads on the misuse of drugs. Work has focused on measures to reduce the demand for drugs. Related discussions have centred on targeting the proceeds of drug trafficking; drug awareness campaigns; emerging trends in drug misuse; the effects of substance misuse on children; homelessness and drugs use; and rehabilitation. In the BIC, Ministers have identified cocaine as a significant issue that affects all member Administrations. In that area, Ministers are resolved to continue to co-operate and exchange experiences, with particular emphasis on initiatives that have led to successful outcomes and which may lend themselves to broader application in other Administrations.

In February of this year, the Taoiseach hosted a summit of the British-Irish Council that had misuse of drugs as one of the major themes. It concluded that all Administrations should include renewed focus on the families of problem drug

users  
in any future drugs strategies that are prepared, with a view to providing  
increased  
support to those families and better harnessing their potential to facilitate life  
improvements for problem drug users.

**Mr Charlie O'Connor TD:** I thank the Minister for that positive and detailed  
reply.

It has been significant that drugs issues have dominated the agenda today — we  
should all take note of that. I hope that the secretariat will convey to the relevant  
Ministers in all our jurisdictions some of the excellent and useful suggestions  
that  
were made during the Cornmarket Project presentation. It is important that we  
do  
that.

*5.30 pm*

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** I thank Charlie O'Connor. I state  
publicly that that is the first public speech of his in which Tallaght was not  
mentioned, certainly in my time with him.

I thank the Minister very much for being with us, especially considering the  
excruciating pain that he is in. Thank you very much for bearing with us — we  
really  
appreciate it.

I have a few short announcements to make. Our bus is due to leave for the  
Ferrycarrig Hotel at 6.45 pm, so I ask you all to be in the lobby downstairs at that  
time. We go to the Ferrycarrig for dinner at 8 o'clock.

I propose that we meet tomorrow morning at 9.45 am, if Members agree, then  
we will be out by 11 am. I am easy and the Co-Chair, Peter Hain, is very easy. Are  
we agreed to meet at 9.45? I see that you are. Therefore, I close the session until  
tomorrow morning. Enjoy your evening.

*Adjourned at 5.32 pm.*

**TUESDAY, 29 APRIL 2008**

*The Body met at 9.53 am.*

## **BUSINESS REPORTS FROM CHAIRMEN OF COMMITTEES**

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** The Body is now in public session. We will start with the business reports from the chairmen of the Committees. I will be as brief as I can and finish as quickly as members who speak on the Committee reports allow me. I call on the Vice Chairman of Committee A.

### **Committee A (Sovereign Matters)**

**Rt Hon Michael Mates MP:** In Jim O’Keeffe’s absence, we finally had a response from the UK Government on the identification card report we wrote and the common travel area. The Minister of State of the Home Office, Liam Byrne, responded on the issues of e-borders within the common travel area and the Government agreed with the recommendation that, in developing e-borders, proper consideration be given to the possible impact of the common travel area. Discussions on the impact of e-borders on journeys within the common travel area have already been held with the Irish and Crown Dependency Governments as part of a review of the rules and operation of the common travel area. Part of that review included monitoring of all air and sea movements across the common travel area borders via e-borders. The Government is preparing proposals for consultation on police powers to collect passenger and other data on domestic air and sea journeys. We have agreed that we want to seek further information on e-borders from the UK and Irish Governments.

As to penalty points, I ask Alf Dubs to report on that because he was the rapporteur on the Committee and knows more about it than I do.

**The Lord Dubs:** The penalty points situation has gone on much longer than we thought. As a footnote, we discovered in the course of our work that a driver disqualified in Britain was not disqualified in Northern Ireland. This had to be sorted out. We have now had an assurance from Minister Arlene Foster that the process of achieving mutual recognition of disqualifications between the UK and Ireland will come into force in autumn 2008.

Regarding penalty points, which are for lesser offences, work is proceeding and Minister Foster said there was an investigation into how to do this. We hope that will happen in the interests of road safety before too long. The positive aspect is that progress is happening and that when Paul Murphy speaks to the plenary in Newcastle in October, to report from the British-Irish Council, he will be able to

update us on the penalty points situation.

**Rt Hon Michael Mates MP:** We are preparing a report into cross-border cooperation between the Garda Síochána and the PSNI, and focusing on how the police forces and the Governments work together on cross-border cases and whether the local people affected by the crimes were satisfied that the police forces had cooperated as fully as possible. We are visiting the border area, including Monaghan, where the headquarters of the northern division of the Garda Síochána is located, in June and July.

**Seymour Crawford TD:** As someone who lives near the Border and travels from there to Dublin on a constant basis, I congratulate the Committee on its work. That people feel they can drive whatever way they like once they cross the Border is one of the more serious issues as far as road traffic is concerned, whether these people are from Northern Ireland or other jurisdictions. I have been pushing this issue for a long time and I thank the Committee for its tenacity. Hopefully it will be sorted out before too long.

**Rory O'Hanlon TD:** I agree with Seymour Crawford. The Border issue is very important for the island of Ireland. We do not want to see an end to the free travel between North and South. Neither would we like to see an end to it between Ireland and Britain. We would like it to continue as is. It is important that both Governments discuss it and find a way to avoid a situation that has not existed since the establishment of the State, except for a few years during World War II.

### **Committee B (European Affairs)**

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** I call Charlie O'Connor in place of Robert Walter, who is the absentee Chairman.

**Mr Charlie O'Connor TD:** I will give a brief report on behalf of Robert Walter, who had to leave on business, and other colleagues. We had a well-attended meeting yesterday but did not have much to report because, unfortunately, for a number of reasons we could not set up meetings relating to European security and defence that we had agreed at the previous meeting. At yesterday's discussion we made plans to hold such meetings after the EU referendum, which many of us feel is important. In fairness, my British colleagues saw the importance of not having meetings before that. We have set up a schedule of meetings in July and September. Meanwhile, the Chairman undertook to continue informal contacts with the Irish General in charge of the UN Chad mission, Pat

Nash, who he will meet informally during the week. When we meet at Newcastle we hope we will have a more detailed and meaningful report to present.

*10.00 am*

### **Committee C (Economic)**

**Mr Seymour Crawford TD:** Thank you, Co-Chair. I apologise on behalf of Deputy Seán Ó Fearghaíl, Chairman of Committee C, who had to go home yesterday on an urgent matter. I was in attendance at one of the long tables in the dining room yesterday morning, which is not the most satisfactory place to hold meetings because we could not hear all that was happening. There has been a problem in getting meetings of the committee scheduled to deal with the report on energy. We decided to read a number of reports before a meeting on 3 July in London, where we hope to get a briefing from people in the Departments involved and industry. We hope to finalise our report on that issue for the session at Newcastle upon Tyne. It is a detailed issue and is extremely important. We visited Scotland and the area of the Co-Chair, Donegal, but we did not hold the other meetings we had hoped to arrange. I would rather that the group visits sites, although it is time consuming. It is difficult to change to a book involvement process, which does not give people the same idea of what can be done. Committee C will meet in London on 3 July and intends to have report for the Newcastle-upon-Tyne meeting.

### **Committee D (Environmental and Social)**

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** I call Lord Dubs, Chairman of Committee D.

**The Lord Dubs:** Thank you, Co-Chairman. Committee D is in the middle of a study on the integration of newly arrived migrants to Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Wales. We chose those three jurisdictions because we did not have the time or resources to cover other jurisdictions, as colleagues will understand. We held an evidence session in Belfast and propose to visit Dublin to take evidence in June. We also propose to visit Cardiff within the next few weeks. Our aim is that the report be completed, agreed and presented to the plenary session in Newcastle in October. We are working on a tight timetable. If Members have thoughts we are happy to hear these before finalising our report. After that, as a result of discussions between Committees A and D, Committee D will take on board a study of climate change. We must define that more sharply than climate change or the study will be too wide. We

will probably examine co-operation within jurisdictions but we must think harder about how to define it. That will follow the immigration study. We will be reinforced by two members of Committee A, who will join Committee D for the purpose of the study. Any thoughts of colleagues on this will be welcome. It is a big undertaking but I am anxious that we do not have such a large study that it goes on forever and that we lose momentum and the sharpness of the work. At some point I would like to comment on the Irish Government's response to our report on the Irish community. Would the Co-Chair like me to do that now or later?

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** Later. We will come to that shortly.

## **RESPONSES TO PREVIOUS REPORTS**

### **Committee A (Political and Sovereign Affairs): "ID Cards and the Common Travel Area"**

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** Item 2 is consideration of a response to a previous report, Committee A's report entitled "ID Cards and the Common Travel Area". The Irish Government's response to the report has been received. I ask Lord Dubs or Michael Mates to move the motion formally on behalf of the Steering Committee.

**Rt Hon Michael Mates MP:** I beg to move

*That the Committee takes note of the response of the Irish Government to the Report of Committee A entitled "ID Cards and the Common Travel Area" (Doc No 135).*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That the Body take note of the report of Committee A entitled "ID Cards and the Common Travel Area" (Doc No 135).*

**Committee A (Political and Sovereign Affairs):  
“Penalty Points”**

**The Lord Dubs:** I beg to move

*That the Committee takes note of the response of the Irish Government to the Report of Committee A entitled “Penalty Points” (Doc No 133).*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That the Body take note of the report of Committee A entitled “Penalty Points” (Doc No 133).*

**Committee D (Environmental and Social Affairs):  
“Irish Community in Britain”**

**The Lord Dubs:** I beg to move

*That the Committee takes note of the response of the Irish Government to the Report of Committee A entitled “Irish Community in Britain” (Doc No 134).*

We produced that report and members will recall that we had a lengthy discussion at our last plenary near Oxford earlier this year. The response of the Irish Government was received a little while ago and is available here. It is a positive and encouraging response. Before I am asked about the response of the British Government, I have to say we do not have one. We intend to press the British Government on a response in parallel with the response of the Irish Government. It is proper that we do not let things go when we have a report. We should make sure the governmental bodies asked to deal with recommendations respond positively. I assure the Co-Chairman and Members that we will pursue the British Government now that we have one from Dublin.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That the Committee takes note of the response of the Irish Government to the Report of Committee A entitled “Irish Community in Britain” (Doc No 134).*

**TWELFTH ANNUAL REPORT**

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** We now come to Item 3, the Twelfth Annual Report of the Body. I ask the Co-Chair to move.

**The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Peter Hain MP):** I beg to move  
*That the Body take note of the Twelfth Annual Report.*

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** I invite any comments on the Twelfth Annual Report.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That the Body take note of the Twelfth Annual Report.*

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** On our final item I call on Hon Stephen Rodan to move the adjournment.

**Hon. Stephen Rodan MHK:** I beg to move

*That the Body do now adjourn.*

I am delighted to move the adjournment and express appreciation for a most enjoyable and well-organised plenary conference in Wexford. I speak for us all when

I compliment the staff and the manner in which the conference has been organised. I

thank Mr Eoin Faherty's staff and the clerks to the Committees: Deirdre Clarke, Rhiannon Hollis, Nerys Welfoot, Hilary O'Brien, Tracey Garratty and Audrey Nelson. The early start yesterday, which seems much longer ago, ensured we got through the business in a timely fashion for which the Co-Chairmen are to be congratulated. The facilities at this hotel, White's, as well as the dinner at Ferrycarrig

Hotel, showed Irish hospitality at its best, for which we thank the Co-Chairmen.

The

spouses' tour was well enjoyed. A welcome is appropriate to the new Irish administrator, Julie Clarke, and to the support staff behind the scenes, Danny Greham, Mary Corrigan and John McCarthy. It was a conference that allowed new and old friendships to be made and renewed and the spirit of the conference has been a positive one. In the spirit of North/South and emerging east-west dimensions to the conference it is appropriate that the next meeting of the steering group is in the middle. I shall enjoy welcoming the steering group to the Isle of Man in June for the meeting. In due course there might be a plenary conference in the Isle of Man.

**The Co-Chairman (Rt Hon Peter Hain MP):** Thank you, Stephen. We are looking forward to the steering committee meeting in the Isle of Man. I thank the clerks, the

Hansard reporters, the sound engineers and all the staff from the different embassies. I also thank the hotel staff who provided a great place to stay.

I wish to express my astonishment that there was not a standing ovation for me when I congratulated the Welsh team on the Grand Slam. I have no idea why that did not happen. I missed Cecilia Keaveney's performance on the piano last night but I gather it was a resounding success, with lots of bawdy songs, including by the clerks, unnamed. It sounds as though it was a thoroughly disreputable occasion, typical of Irish hospitality. I thank my Co-Chairman and to all who made this possible. As always in my experience of official duties in Ireland, as a Minister or an MP, we have had fantastic hospitality. I hope we can rival that in Newcastle.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Niall Blaney TD):** Thank you, Peter. If we continue in the same vein with the same co-operation we had this weekend, the Body has a good future. I thank all Members because life has been easy up here. Michael Mates reminds us of the days of old, when co-operation was not so good. I thank Members for their co-operation. I now formally declare closed this thirty-sixth plenary session of the Body. We meet next on Monday, 20 and Tuesday, 21 October 2008 in Newcastle, England.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

*That the Body do now adjourn.*

*Adjourned at 10.13 am.*

## **ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS NOT REACHED**

*The following questions were not answered during Oral Answers to Questions on Monday 28 April 2008 and accordingly received a written answer. The answers have not been subject to the normal Official Report process and are published as issued by the Secretary of State.*

### **The Anti-Sectarianism Fund**

**1 The Baroness Blood** asked the Minister if he will make a statement on the benefits

of the Irish Government's new anti-sectarianism fund.

**The Minister for Social and Family Affairs (Mr Martin Cullen TD):** The current programme for government gave a commitment to "establish a new Anti-Sectarianism Fund to assist projects in interface areas designed specifically to address the root cause of sectarianism and to diffuse tensions". The fund was launched by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Dermot Ahern TD, in Belfast on 27 February last.

The Irish Government is especially conscious of the important role that community based organisations play in combating sectarianism. The Anti-Sectarianism Fund can be accessed by community based applicants, who would not ordinarily have the technical capacity to meet the application requirements of larger funders. The Fund will serve as a dedicated resource to support new, innovative and more effective ways of addressing sectarianism and division in society.

### **The Devolution of Policing and Justice Matters**

3 **Mr Jim O'Keeffe TD** asked the Minister the up-to-date position in relation to the devolution of policing and justice matters in Northern Ireland and the expected time table in this regard.

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** I refer you to my answers to questions 14 and 19.

### **Renewable Energy Generation**

5 **Mr Paul Flynn MP** asked the Minister what new initiatives are planned by his Government in renewable energy generation?

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** The Government is committed to a cleaner, greener environment which is strongly reflected in the pace of our renewable energy policy development. The Government has announced an ambitious programme to almost treble the contribution by renewable energy sources to 15% by 2010 and 33% by 2020. Already the capacity of renewable energy powered electricity generating plants connected to the electricity network has more than doubled in the last three years.

Ireland was also given a 16% renewable energy target in the January European Union Energy and Climate Change package. This target is broadly in line with the

electricity, heat and transport targets set out in the White Paper. Our targets are ambitious but achievable and our policies and programmes to meet those goals are already firmly established.

The Government has introduced a range of renewable energy support programmes valued at over €400 million. A number of high-profile schemes have been introduced in the last two years to support the deployment of renewable heat technologies. The potential for co-operation in the area of renewable energy is under active consideration on a North/South and east-west basis.

### **Maritime Collaboration**

**12 Andrew Mackinlay MP** asked the Minister if he will make a statement on maritime collaboration between the Irish Republic and the United Kingdom (and the Isle of Man) in respect of air-sea rescue, combating organised crime, pollution control and environmental protection.

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** The Irish Government co-operates extensively with the British authorities on all these areas of mutual concern, including at EU and international fora.

With respect to air-sea rescue, the Irish and British Coastguard services retain a close working relationship on a day-to-day operational level and at senior management level. Co-operation includes exchange visits, joint training exercises and services in support of search and rescue operations. Likewise, there is close co-operation between the Irish Coastguard and the Northern Irish Coastguard, and a formal operational agreement is under discussion for co-operation in the Irish Sea.

With regard to pollution response and environmental protection, informal cooperation and collaboration are part of operational procedures, including early warnings on shipping movements involving pollutant cargoes and hazardous substances that are likely to constitute a threat to either coast.

In terms of combating organised crime, Revenue's Customs Service also engages regularly in the sharing of information and intelligence with its British counterparts in HM Revenue & Customs and this co-operation is underpinned by a memorandum of understanding on operational maritime surveillance between both agencies. Joint bilateral and EU Regional Maritime surveillance exercises and operations are carried out on an ongoing basis.

Both the UK and Ireland last September signed the international agreement setting up the Maritime Analysis and Operation Centre Narcotics (MAOC-N) in Lisbon, Portugal. To date this centre has been extremely effective in seizing multi-tons of cocaine and cannabis and disrupting organised crime engaged in this large scale trafficking.

### **Cross-border Educational Opportunities**

13 **Mr Brian Hayes TD** asked the Minister to outline his proposal, if any, to enhance cross-border educational opportunities for students in both parts of Ireland, and if he will make a statement on the matter

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** There is extensive co-operation already under way between the two Departments of Education including through the North/South Ministerial Council. This co-operation aims to address common issues such as geographical and economic disadvantage, improving services for children and young people with special educational needs, improving joint training and teacher development for the benefit of schools North and South and allowing children and young people to meet and work together and to come to know and understand each other.

In 2007 alone, approximately 900 primary, post-primary and special schools, drawn from Ireland and Northern Ireland, were engaged in North/South collaborative projects involving approximately 10,000 students and young people. The level of ongoing collaboration between third level institutions North and South has been good. All courses within the third level sector in the South are open to applicants from Northern Ireland. The Government will also seek to enhance collaboration between Institutes of Technology, particularly those in Dundalk, Sligo and Letterkenny, and their Northern counterparts.

The National Development Plan (2007-2013) prioritises a number of strategic initiatives for cross-border collaboration in education including a significant upgrading of higher education capacity in the North-West, promotion of graduate mobility, graduate retention and access for people from disadvantaged areas to higher education and a comprehensive study on education co-operation.

### **Drug-free Rehabilitation Services**

18 **Joan Burton TD** asked the Minister about the development and use of drug-free

rehabilitation services, particularly for people who have been using methadone.

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** There are heightened risks, including the risk of overdose and death, associated with relapse after detoxification from drug use.

Transferring

any opiate-user, including individuals who are using methadone, into drug-free rehabilitation services is complicated.

It is essential therefore that a “continuum of care” approach is put in place to maximise the potential for successful rehabilitation and to minimise the heightened risks involved with relapse. The Report of the Working Group on Drugs Rehabilitation, the implementation of which forms part of the programme for government, sets out a series of recommendations focussed on developing a framework that will provide a “continuum of care” approach so as to minimise these risks.

The key recommendations involved are: an effective inter-agency approach based on a continuum of care for the individual; an expansion of the range of treatment options; building on the rehabilitative impact of Community Employment Schemes; and broader life issues including medical support, access to employment, education and housing.

The Government is working towards implementing the recommendations of the report to ensure that as many people as possible are given the opportunity and supports needed to achieve rehabilitation and reintegration into communities

### **The Narrow Water Bridge Project**

20 **Mr Séamus Kirk TD** asked the Minister if he will update the Body on the Narrow Water bridge project, and if he will make a statement on this matter.

**Mr Martin Cullen TD:** The Irish Government’s commitment to enhance tourist links between County Louth and County Down is set out in our National Development Plan 2007-2013, and our programme for government makes clear that we see the construction of a bridge at Narrow Water, over Carlingford Lough, as a priority in this regard. The cross-border bridge will significantly enhance access to the fabulous scenery of the Mourne and Cooley mountains for visitors from at home and abroad. It is expected that the construction of the bridge, and its effect on local tourism, would have a significant and positive effect for local economies.

Louth County Council was granted €390,000 by the Department of Transport to appoint consultants to take forward a technical study on the bridge proposal. The consultants have now been appointed and the technical study is under way.

The Narrow Water bridge has also been the subject of discussion at the North/South Ministerial Council in Transport sectoral format, which will keep the matter under review and draw on the results of the technical work when they are available. The next Transport Sectoral Meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council is scheduled to take place in the coming weeks.