

BRITISH-IRISH PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-EIGHTH PLENARY SESSION

Monday 13 May 2019

The Assembly met at 9.37 am.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS AND TRIBUTE TO STEFFAN LEWIS AM

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. If I could call the Assembly to order, we are now in public session. Ladies and gentlemen, first I would like to remind you that everyone present should please turn their mobile phones off, or at least turn them to silent. Secondly, could I ask Members, when they are invited to contribute from the Floor, if they would clearly state their name and which Parliament or Assembly they are representing. And, finally, may I remind Members that the proceedings of this body do not attract parliamentary privilege.

I would like to take a moment to note the deep regret the Assembly felt at the recent passing of one of our Members, Steffan Lewis, Assembly Member from Wales. And so may I, on behalf of all Members of the Assembly, extend our condolences to his family and friends at this deeply sad time. And I would like to invite Ann Jones, Assembly Member from Wales and Deputy Presiding Officer from the Welsh Assembly to say a few words in memory of Steffan.

Ann Jones AM:

Diolch, Co-Chair. Thank you very much, Co-Chair. And, colleagues, if I could just say thank you to all of those who contacted us at the very sad time when we lost Steffan. Steffan passed away in January at the age of 34. He leaves a widow, Shona, and a young son, Celyn, whom he was very proud of. Throughout Steffan's terminal bowel cancer, Steffan was very brave. Steffan turned into the Assembly when he felt he could and his contributions were always very much heartfelt and very much listened to.

Steffan was very brave in saying that it was OK to say you are afraid and you are afraid of what the illness was, and throughout all of that Steffan gave us all hope and courage. He was elected to the Assembly in 2016, which was just the last set of elections, but he made such an impression on us all and he became his party's spokesperson on Brexit and international affairs, so much so that he co-authored, with the Welsh Government, our White Paper on Brexit. Steffan was, indeed, incredibly gifted, talented and when he spoke, he spoke about a kinder politics that we all aim for and that all of us here should aspire to.

Politics was not always his only step in life, although he did admit he had his dream job when he was elected. He was a knowledgeable Welsh historian and an ardent supporter of football, but not Welsh football — Celtic. And Steffan would defend that to the hilt.

Although Steffan did not attend many BIPA plenaries, I think my one abiding memory of Steffan was in Malahide where, having put a shift into the plenary, spoke about Brexit, we then retired to the bar. Steffan carried on debating politics in the bar but then he ended up singing, in the early hours of the morning, with a pint of Guinness, obviously, in his hand.

And so tonight, when we get back to the hotel and many of us will go to the bar, I think we should all raise our glasses and say, "Iechyd da, Steffan". "Sláinte" and "Gorffwys mewn Heddwch, rest in peace". Diolch.

[Applause.]

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

I also remind Members of the Assembly of the sad passing of Paul Flynn MP, Member of Parliament in the House of Commons but a long-standing Member of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, who passed away recently. So, in memory of both Steffan and Paul Flynn, could I ask us all to just stop for a few moments to reflect?

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Could I also include in these remarks that Andrew's mother died a number of months ago there. A number of us would have met her in London, when we went to his constituency area. Maybe, just as part of these proceedings, we could remember Andrew's mother as well, Eileen.

[Period of silence.]

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much.

Ladies and gentlemen, Members, I would like to now formally welcome you all here today to Newtownmountkennedy. This setting here, in Druids Glen, in the magnificent county of Wicklow, is also known as the “garden of Ireland”. Wicklow, as we can all see, is a beautiful county, full of majestic mountains, breathtaking coastline and monastic treasures. We are delighted to be hosting the 58th plenary session of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly here in the scenic surroundings of the Druids Glen Hotel & Golf Resort. And I am sure that Members will find the time — I hope you will find the time — to take advantage of the facilities and the incredible environment that we are lucky to be in, here, during this particular plenary. And I thank our Irish hosts for arranging such a wonderful location.

You have all been circulated with an up-to-date list of BIPA membership in your briefing packs, and I have to inform the Assembly that, in accordance with rule 2(a), the following associate Members have accepted the invitation of the Steering Committee to assume the powers and responsibility of Members for the whole session. They are Aengus Ó Snodaigh, Senator Gerry Horkan, Viscount Bridgeman, Vicky Ford MP, John Grogan MP, The Rt Hon. Lord Kilclooney and Neil Hamilton AM. And we have also received apologies from the following Members of the Assembly: Mattie McGrath TD, Pat the Cope Gallagher TD, Kathleen Funchion TD, Tony McLoughlin TD, Senator Diarmuid Wilson, Joe Carey TD, Andrew Bridgen MP, Vernon Coaker MP, Rosie Cooper MP, Nigel Evans MP, Lord Lexden, Jack Lopresti MP, Conor McGinn MP, Baroness Ó Cathain, Chris Ruane MP, Willie Coffey MSP and Ross Greer MP.

I would now like to hand over to my Co-Chair, Seán Crowe.

9.45 am

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Good morning. I am delighted to welcome Members here today for the fifty-eighth plenary session of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. Members will have received the copy of the programme of business. During this plenary, we will focus some of our discussions on the urgent challenges facing us as parliamentarians, particularly in relation to climate change, and we will hear from a number of speakers on this issue. We will shortly hear from Richard

Bruton, Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, who will give the opening address to the Assembly. We will also hear from Laura Burke, director general of the Environmental Protection Agency, this morning. Later in the afternoon, we will consider the impact on the marine environment, when Dr Stephen Hynes and Professor Melanie Austen address the Assembly.

We will hear from the British Ambassador, His Excellency Robin Barnett, who will update the Assembly on British-Irish diplomatic relations. In the afternoon, the business of the Assembly will include the adoption of the annual report and updates from Committee Chairs A and C and a debate on a motion agreed at the Steering Committee. We will also hear from Dr Anthony Soares, Centre for Cross Border Studies, who will address the Assembly on the report, 'A New Common Chapter'.

We expect today's session to conclude around 5.30 pm. This will give Members an opportunity to freshen up ahead of travelling to Powerscourt Estate for a reception and formal dinner which will be addressed by Simon Coveney, Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs, who will address the after-dinner speech.

We are delighted that Committee B will present its report to this Assembly on Tuesday morning. Darren Millar AM, Chair of Committee B, will present Committee B's report, the 'Second Interim Report on European Security Cooperation: Port Security and Infrastructure', to the Assembly. Lord Dubs will also update the Assembly on the work of Committee D.

The Assembly will then hear from representatives from the National Youth Council of Ireland on its work on sustainable development goals. Again, it is hoped that the Assembly will adjourn at 12.15 pm on Tuesday.

It is very fitting that we have a plenary in this beautiful and historic county of Wicklow, as we discuss the future challenges impacting not only on politics but on all our citizens' lives, in particular the growing urgency and the need to deal with climate matters.

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I will now ask Deputy Declan Breathnach to formally move that the adoption of the proposed programme of business be agreed.

The Vice-Chairman (Deputy Declan Breathnach):

Thank you, Co-Chairs. I wish to formally propose the adoption of the programme of business for the fifty-eighth plenary of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Is that agreed?

Programme of Business agreed.

ADDRESS BY MR RICHARD BRUTON TD, MINISTER FOR COMMUNICATIONS, CLIMATE ACTION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much, Seán. Ladies and gentlemen, it now gives me great pleasure to invite our first speaker to address the Assembly today. I welcome Richard Bruton TD, Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment, to give his opening address. I

welcome you, sir, to the Assembly today as we hear your opening address, and then we will take questions from the floor. Thank you so much for coming. You are most welcome.

[Applause.]

Mr Richard Bruton TD (Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment):

Thanks very much indeed, Andrew and Seán. It is a great honour for me to address you on what is, I suppose, the most pressing issue that faces us as parliamentarians anywhere in these islands or, indeed, globally. I suppose one thing to say about Ireland, at the outset, is that I think Ireland has achieved remarkable change in the past 10 years. Ireland is a very different place. We would have hardly believed possible some of the things that have changed in that period. At an economic level, after a profound crash that saw 20% of private sector employment wiped out, we have rebuilt that, and we see more people back at work now than there were even before that crash started. We have also seen a major transformation in our financial affairs. Most of all, I suppose, we have seen a remarkable change in our society, change, particularly, in our constitution. The removal of the eighth amendment and the provision for gay marriage represent remarkable changes that many of us, 10 years ago, would not have thought possible. I think that gives us a certain confidence, looking at the challenge of climate, that we have, as a society, the capacity to rethink things, even things that we had profound and very embedded points of view about. It will take all that capacity to address what is the greatest challenge facing humanity.

It is interesting the sort of things that helped us make those changes. We had an innovation here — the Citizens’ Assembly — which was, essentially, drawing together ordinary members of the public with a certain level of leadership and expertise becoming available to them. Basically, it was a citizens’ jury looking at issues such as the eighth amendment and whether Ireland should make changes and teasing out those issues. That was followed in those constitutional cases by an all-party Oireachtas assembly which created a report that outlined common ground — I would not say “consensus” — that, perhaps, a lot of us going into that process didn’t think would be possible.

The same has been true of the challenge of climate change. We had a Citizens’ Assembly that endorsed the need for really radical action. We have had an all-party Oireachtas Committee which, after many hours of hearings and reporting — some Members here were part of that — has produced a report. Last week, in the Dáil, not only was that report endorsed, but the Dáil unanimously declared a climate and biodiversity emergency. We have created, I suppose, an underpinning of major change. I suppose it falls to me, as the representative of government with responsibility for climate action, to now pull together a set of proposals that will be a road map running across all of the hugely different range of areas that we have to address.

One of the things that became clear in Ireland was that, as we emerged from the economic crash, we failed to break the link between growing economic prosperity and emissions. Our emissions in the last few years have shown signs of growing, particularly, in sectors such as agriculture, industry and transport. Some of the other sectors continue to show progress, but those core sectors have not been able to decouple recovery in those sectors from emissions.

I suppose that what is now clear is that we need to make really profound changes in our lifestyle, and, of course, that starts with government. Government has a huge responsibility to create the framework, the leadership, the policy environment where those major changes can occur. It also requires changes in every single business, every farm, every sector to look at

how they are using the resources — in particular, fossil fuels — and how they decarbonise their activities. It requires every home, every worker, every pupil to look at what they do in their lifestyle: how they heat their buildings, how they travel to and from their place of engagement, how they manage resources around them to make sure they use every resource in a sustainable way. We'll also need to look at our big networks — our power network, our transport network, our land use approach — and, again, recalibrate those to ensure that we decarbonise. We will have to look at every resource, every material that we use, every residue that we generate and see how do we, again, adopt the principles of the so-called circular economy, where we prevent, we reduce, we reuse, we recycle and we minimise the waste that we generate.

As I say, we start from the same approach as delivered results in some of the other areas. We have declared an emergency, but, I suppose, it is an emergency that is different from other emergencies that would've been faced in the past in that it isn't a matter of one person being endowed with some superpowers so that, in some way, they can produce the silver bullet that will resolve the issue. This is a much more profound level of change that has to engage every institution, be it public or private, and leadership will be absolutely crucial — not only leadership in government, although that, obviously, is profoundly important in every part of the public service; we also need leaders in every organisation. It means in enterprise C-level — chief executive officer level — leadership must engage with how does their enterprise become one that can be robust and competitive in a decarbonised world. I think that is the way to look at it. Yes, this is asking people to make huge changes, but the reality is that those who fail to make such changes in their enterprise will not be competitive in the years ahead, as the price of carbon goes from €20 today to a predicted €100 in 2030 and €265 in 2050. Enterprises that regard carbon dioxide as a free externality, as the economists would call it, that they can happily generate without paying any heed will fail. They will be the companies who will go to the wall, and their business will be gobbled up by others who move much more swiftly.

We also need to engage members of our community — ordinary citizens — in a way and help them to make the changes in their lives that are so important if we are to succeed. They need the reassurance that, in making those changes, the transition will be fair and we do not ask some people to bear an unfair burden relative to others and that people whose activity is displaced because of its high carbon intensity are given the support to transit into other areas.

I hope to be able to go to government in the coming weeks, and my task is to bring forward, if you like, the targets at sectoral level and the policy road map to achieve the sort of scale of change we need to achieve. We need to achieve, as you know, a 30% reduction in the period to 2030. That represents minus 2% per annum. If we are to go beyond that and approach a near-zero situation by 2050, you are talking about accelerating that rate of reduction to 7% per annum in the period after 2030. This is a really sharp rate of change that we have to adopt.

We will look at all of the key areas: electricity, the built environment, transport, enterprise, farming, forestry, waste. In every sector we will examine and evaluate in what areas the most cost-effective change can be made and the changes that generate most opportunity. Of course, while a lot of this is about challenges, it also generates opportunity. I think that sense has to be very much at the heart of what we do. An economy that is decarbonised in 20, 30 or 40 years' time will have very different types of enterprise, and those who succeed are the ones who lay the groundwork now for that success.

We have already flagged some of the direction of change. We have recognised, for example, in the electricity sector, where, at the moment, we are 70% dependent on fossil fuels, 30% on renewables, that we will reverse that by 2030. We aim to be 70% renewable by 2030. That represents a huge change, and, just to give you examples, we will need more interconnectors, we will need more solar farms and wind farms and we will need to build and strengthen our network to carry that renewable capacity. It will represent significant changes in infrastructural investment across the face of Ireland. In itself, that will be a challenge to bring people with us on that journey.

In the area of the built environment, roughly speaking, 80% of existing buildings are at a low level of energy insulation and high fossil fuel use. We will need to change that over the coming years. That will represent a very substantial upfront cost, even though it generates significant long-term savings. That represents a challenge.

In the transport area, we have already committed that, by 2030, there will be no more internal combustion engine cars being purchased in Ireland. Again, we have to see a very sharp trajectory moving away from what is today less than 5% electric vehicles to, by 2030, 100% of new purchases being electric. That represents a massive change, and we have to underpin that with infrastructural investments. You can go through each of those sectors. I am not going to do that now, but every one of the sectors — farming will face profound changes as the price of carbon comes along. We will have to make dramatic changes in the way we manage waste to ensure we reduce the resource demand of material production. It is estimated that nearly 60% of all carbon comes from the way we handle materials, so, if we can improve the handling of those materials and minimise waste, maximise reuse, we can have a profound impact.

10.00 am

The range of policies will be varied, and, I suppose, they, obviously, fall fairly neatly into three categories. There are market interventions, and, as you know, the all-party Oireachtas Committee has adopted a view — not unanimous but broad support for the idea that the carbon price should go from €20 per ton, which it is today, to €80 per ton by 2030. Obviously, carbon and pricing and other market signals can have a very significant effect in this marketplace. For those of you, again, who are economists or think about those things, it depends on the elasticity of response. Of course, there are other instruments. Regulation in certain sectors will have to play a role, where new standards will be set and evolved. Of course, the most important one is the sort of developmental models that different sectors will need in order to adapt, whether it be to deal with the high upfront cost. We will need smarter finance models. We will need information and support, because a lot of the changes in technology are not ones that people are automatically familiar with, so there will be a lot of changes in those three areas that we will have to adopt.

In terms of the methodology, I was Minister for Jobs in the previous Government, and one of the things that we found successful when we had a similar broad challenge right across government was to adopt what we called an “action plan for jobs”. At the heart of it was a demand from the centre — from the Prime Minister’s office — that every Department would not only volunteer actions but be accountable, quarter by quarter, for the delivery of those actions. It has proven a good model to focus attention and delivery and is particularly good because, each year, we refresh and renew and look at which elements are working, which are not and seek to adapt the policy suite. That is particularly suited for this area, where technology certainty will not be there in respect of the best interventions for climate. We see technologies evolve very rapidly, new offshore technologies breaking through, anaerobic

digestion breaking through. Lots of technologies will manifest themselves, and we need to ensure that, year by year, we adapt our strategy to take account of those.

I am not trying to preach, but I am speaking to people who, I think, understand this probably as well if not better than I do. I'm relatively recently here, with just a few months of service, but what I see is a real opportunity to show that we can create a better global environment, that we can show leadership but can live healthier, better attuned to the world around us, use resources more widely, take greater responsibility for global responsibilities and what's happening in other countries who are at the very sharp end of this. I was lucky enough to be at Katowice, where, I suppose, we had both ends of the spectrum warning us that the window is fast closing and that we are at a tipping point. You had the very venerable David Attenborough, a man who has been our living rooms for years and is a very respected voice that everyone knows, and, at the other end of the spectrum, we had young Greta Thunberg explaining that our generation has failed and has let down the generation coming behind us.

There is a moment of opportunity that we need to seize and not in a way, I hope, that will see people set against one another. That would set back the challenge. If this becomes the farming community versus the urban or similar divisions, we will find our capacity to act and deliver in a coherent way greatly handicapped. One of the things that we have to make sure of is that we maintain some level of common ground politically to bring people with us. Of course, there will be political differences about the detail, but we need to contain that within an overall ambition to deliver what is a massive threat that faces humanity, for which our generation of politicians must take the greatest responsibility for leadership, because, I suppose, we have been beneficiaries of some of the progress that has been built, sadly, on unsustainable grounds with the love affair that we've had with fossil fuels.

I will leave it at that, joint Chair, and I am happy to take questions and participate in any way you feel appropriate.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much, Minister. May I have some indication of those who would like to ask questions? OK, Lord Empey to start with.

Lord Empey:

One of the things that, I think, a number of us are concerned about is displacement; in other words, if western European countries drive down our carbon footprint, there is no point in doing that unless south-east Asia is doing the same. Otherwise, we are simply moving relatively clean production from the west to power stations in south-east Asia that are belching out coal and opening maybe a 400-megawatt power station per week. What guarantees can we have that we're not simply displacing our production of CO₂ and moving it somewhere else where it'll be even dirtier than it is here?

Mr Richard Bruton TD:

You have put your finger on one of the profound challenges: what we used to call the "free rider" problem. Someone can come along and be a free rider, and everyone is acting responsibly, but, because they do not, they get the gains of the responsible action of others but get away with continuing their behaviour as before.

There are no absolute guarantees, but, I suppose, what is really striking about the likes of the Katowice conference is that you have some of the poorest countries in the world also committing to be held to account against the very same metrics as we are being asked to be

held to account against. Every country is signing up to this. Some with difference in commitment, but, on the other hand, even those who are not committing to be bound by some of the targets are still accepting to be bound by the monitoring.

This is about how we can make multilateral systems of governance work. There are, underpinning that, funds that provide assistance to those who need help. I suppose there is “Name and shame”. Ultimately, trade barriers can be invoked. If we can get a worldwide — a large body of consensus, I think there is no doubt that we have the capacity to bring the free riders into line.

You are correct: this is a challenge, but what struck me is I sat down with colleague Ministers from Africa who’ve never had a [*Inaudible*] development the way we have and they are taking huge steps to ensure that they adopt a low-carbon trajectory — at a price, but they recognise that there is no future for them in adopting a strategy that will be stranded in a short number of years. It is the power of persuasion and whatever other instruments we can put into multilateral bodies to make them binding.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

We will take questions in groups of three now, so that the Minister can reply to three in one go.

Senator Victor Boyhan:

First, I welcome the Minister, and, I suppose, just conscious of the forum and the Assembly that is here, we cannot altogether forget Brexit. Of course, the potential exists for divergence from EU standards by Westminster, if Brexit is seen through. That is a major challenge for us in the context of the Assembly and the membership of the Assembly. It would lead to deregulatory pressures — that is the reality of it — and that is another challenge around the corner for us and something that we cannot forget.

I just would like to ask the Minister whether he might just talk about — I am very conscious of his document — supporting a just transition. I attended a meeting of farmers, as did some colleagues here, during the week: a mass demonstration of concern from farmers who talk about a just transition. We need to talk more about how we incentivise people in terms of ambitious renewals and climate targets. We have to incentivise climate action.

I note the Minister talking about the all-government approach, and I commend that and think that is excellent. There are two issues I would particularly like you to address: how do you envisage us incentivising climate action to reach ambitious climate targets that we are setting out and also that support for just transition?

I don’t know whether anyone had an opportunity in the last day or two to look in at television debates in terms of European elections, and one thing that recurs everywhere in relation to this issue is a just transition, in terms that everyone is not impacted, so we talk about vulnerable citizens, we talk about the greening issues. That is an area that I would like you to particularly address.

The Hon Juan Watterson SHK:

Perhaps, to build on the previous point, we are entering a significant era of capital investment in decarbonisation. I’d like the views of the Minister on how he sees the affordability of that trickling down to those who, at the moment, can least afford to run cars without the big impact that this has the potential to have on electricity prices, on vehicle ownership and issues like that, making sure that people aren’t left behind in the decarbonisation drive.

Linda Fabiani MSP:

I am interested in the Citizens' Assembly and how it addressed such a huge issue. What were the terms of the remit given and the timescale of the operation?

Mr Richard Bruton TD:

First of all, about Brexit, there has been absolutely no signal that Britain is in any way flinching from its climate commitments: "Au contraire", as the French would say. Its Parliament, as you know, has adopted its own climate emergency, and, even though it is making much more progress than we are, there is a very strong political movement in the UK, as I read it, to be ambitious in this area. I do not see any sign that one of the things that might change would be Britain's commitment to its responsibilities in this sphere.

I agree with you absolutely about the need for a just transition. We need to develop the sort of policy instruments that can make that a reality. There is one thing that we do know: if you take housing, for example, the cost of retrofitting our homes is probably in the order of 40 to 50 billion. There is no way government can fund that, so "just transition" does not mean government and taxpayers paying for everything that has to be done. We have to be conscious of that. "Just transition" is about identifying those who are particularly vulnerable and assisting them to make the changes that are necessary.

The other thing that has to be said — it touches on Juan's point as well — is that, in many of these investments, while there is a substantial upfront cost, if you look at it over the total life of the investments, they are actually cost-positive. They actually save the economy if people make that investment today. About three quarters of the measures that we will have to adopt between now and 2030 are cost-positive. They actually improve the economic performance, if they are adopted. That doesn't make them easy to adopt, but, if you have an electric vehicle that doesn't have emissions over its whole life, you pay more upfront capital, but you actually save yourself and you save the economy carbon emissions. The whole deal, if you like, is cost-neutral.

It is a question, in many ways, of finding smart finance approaches, and we will need to see the financial sector change its attitude as well. The financial sector does not now look at the purchase of a home that has very poor energy rating in a different way from a home that is up to a very high standard. They're not recognising that that is a risk factor, if you like, in their mortgage policy, and, clearly, if you see over time the evolution of a different approach to mortgage giving and a recognition of green mortgages and the need to future-proof the exposure of the bank across its loan books, that would be a very significant way of easing the pressure — the financial pressure — of funding some of these upfront costs. I think also that, as it has done in respect of the impact of small business on Brexit and in microfinance, the state will have to look at taking out some sort of guarantee for some slice of the risk so that we can bring down the cost of doing this on a substantial scale.

10.15 am

We will need to evolve smarter ways of delivering at scale some of the changes that we need to make. At the moment, we have good grants, in some cases, but they tend to be largely driven at individuals, not at large investments, not at large communities getting involved. We will need to scale up our ambition and, with that, bring in the expertise, the financial packages, as well as defining what that building or whatever we are talking about can best make the changes.

We are at the start of a journey of developing the models that will deliver that, and I think other countries are equally groping in this direction. It is clear that there is huge appetite in the financial world for green funding: I think it has to link that appetite for green with actual tangible better ways of funding change. Those are complex questions that we will have to work through.

The just transition, of course, means vulnerable citizens, and, whether it is a perfect or an imperfect, we have used the qualification for fuel scheme, which is about €100 over the level of contributory old-age pension. That has tended to be the threshold that we have used to decide whether a person gets 100% funding or 30% funding. There is within that a sense of just transition, but we will then have specific sectors and, as Vincent says, the beef sector will be one that, in the face of rising carbon prices, as a low-income sector and a high-carbon, high methane-emitting sector, will face natural pressures. I think we will look to the common agricultural policy to make significant changes to allow farmers adopt much lower carbon techniques but also look at diversification.

The Citizens' Assembly is very useful, and Joan Burton would be probably more expert in it than I am. It has been, largely, individual citizens who have been drafted in. At times, there have been political representatives. On the more recent one — the climate action — there were not political representations; it was citizens. It was led by a former judge, and it produced 13 major proposals in a relatively short time, in the space of a couple of months. Now, they obviously do not pretend that they were the last word in policy development. They haven't delved into offshore wave and emerging technologies, but they've given very clear signposts, and the Oireachtas all-party Committee has gone on from that to demand that the Oireachtas has far greater accountability from sectors, from government, from Ministers, that we start to set targets that, like in the UK, will be binding.

They have set a journey, and having a consensus behind you has undoubtedly helped. I am sure there are PhDs being written about the eighth amendment and the role that that process played. In a world where politics is under a far greater scrutiny, I suppose, we are searching for ways to connect to the public, with social media demanding instant responses. It has been a very good counterbalance, encouraging deliberative politics or consideration of the issues and the pros and the cons. It has worked very well here, and we ought, no matter where we are, to seek to evolve such methodologies.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

We have a lot of people wanting to ask questions, so the questions need to be brief and the answers, I am afraid, need to also be brief to fit everybody in; otherwise, we will not get through everyone.

Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony:

First of all, Minister, I thank you for your presentation. It is nice to meet you outside our normal environs of Leinster House, and you are welcome here this morning.

Minister, just two questions, please. As you know, young people are very much into the issue of climate change and climate action, whereas I find, maybe, people 30-plus, because they haven't grown up with the concept of it, find it hard to get their head around things. I include myself in that, even though I am well above 30-plus at this stage. I was just wondering, Minister, whether you had any plans to educate people on the importance of this, particularly targeting the over-30s. My second question, Minister, please, is on the idea of including

seaweed in cattle feed, which was mooted a few months ago, in order to reduce emissions, Can you tell me where that idea is at the moment, please?

Lord Bruce of Bennachie:

Minister, you said you were going to set targets for businesses and individuals, and you said that, obviously, government could not pay for it all, but the question is, “How quickly can we achieve the targets, and how do you get the balance between regulation and state contribution and private investment?”, and, perhaps, “What about commitments to technologies that can actually alleviate carbon such as carbon capture and storage?”. The University of Cambridge is looking at pretty radical things like refreezing the polar ice caps. I am not suggesting that either Ireland or the UK can do these things on our own — Lord Empey’s point is valid — but how do we ensure that we can get there fast enough and take the people with us, given that backsliders will always find excuses why it is all too hard and too expensive?

Vicky Ford:

It is really good to hear the energy that you are putting into this debate and that you, like the UK, have declared this climate emergency. The debate that we had in the House of Commons was enormously well attended. So many people spoke, and one issue that came up a lot of the time from different Members was on carbon storage, particularly on peat bogs. It was pointed out that there is more carbon stored in the peat bogs of the UK than in all the forests of UK, France and Germany put together. There was a lot of discussion about restoration of our peat bogs, which are such an important natural resource. I wonder where the discussion in Ireland has got to on that matter.

Mr Richard Bruton TD:

Thank you for your advice: I will answer them quickly.

There will absolutely be a huge obligation to have a communication strategy around this, and we are working on that. There is the national climate dialogue already in place, but we will have to up that and look at how we engage communities more creatively.

I think the seaweed in cattle is still on the agenda, and, maybe, that brings me to Lord Bruce’s question: “How do we set the targets?”. We will set the targets on the basis of an evaluation of what they call a “MAC curve” — the marginal abatement cost curve. That is based on looking at the whole economy, leaving out whether you are government or private sector, looking at the whole economy and which interventions, which technologies offer you change at the lowest price as of today. Obviously, as technology evolves, that curve changes, but that is how we identify the least cost opportunities out there and then that gives you the targets for the sector that have the greatest capacity in the short term to deliver.

The balance between regulation, intervention and marketing is more an art than a science. There are certain circumstances where regulation presents itself, where the market, maybe, will not respond to changes or where the gains are very large and people failing to act to deliver them are simply acting in a myopic way. Then, regulation is appropriate, but it is an art not a science. I do not think there is anyone who would give you very quick one.

Carbon capture will have to be looked at in that abatement cost curve. As of today, most of the carbon-capture technologies would not be in a place where you would immediately adopt them, but most of the belief is that we are heading to a point where they will be there for adoption. If we need to hit the 2050, they will absolutely have to be adopted, but it is a question of timing.

There is a strategy to restore peat bogs. It is not cheap — I think it is €20,000 per hectare — so, again, it is a question of the level of commitment one can make to that at different stages in the journey.

Neil Hamilton AM:

Minister, in your opening address, you said that we should not ask people to bear an unfair burden in making the changes that are proposed, especially if they are to be telescoped at the speed at which, you indicated, the Irish Government are doing it. It concerns me that the increases in energy costs and charges tend to be massively regressive and bear most heavily on those who are least able to bear those burdens. In Wales, 23% of our households are in fuel poverty, spending more than 10% of their income on heating and lighting, so it is impossible, if we make these scales of changes, to prevent poor people bearing an unfair burden. I do not know if that is the same in Ireland.

I go back to the point that Lord Empey made at the beginning: the rest of the world is simply not following us in this direction. The United States, China and India between them produce more than half the world's CO2 emissions. India produces 7% of the world's emissions. Last year, they increased their CO2 emissions by 7%, and there is no plan to reduce that scale of increase. If we obliterated Wales from the map, India would fill the gap in CO2 emissions in 10 weeks, so why should we impose these massive burdens on poor people, when, actually, we are making no real difference to what happens in the rest of the world?

Senator Catherine Noone:

Welcome, Minister. It is great to have you here for this important discussion. I want to come back to a point that Lord Empey made about China, and, indeed, it was just reflected in the last comment: when it comes to single-use plastic, I know that emissions are, I suppose, the really pressing issue, but that is also a huge issue for us. I come back to another point that Margaret Murphy O'Mahony made about a cultural change in how we educate people: are we doing enough in the context of the EU's upcoming ban on single-use plastic? There is an intention, by 2021, to ban the likes of straws and plastic cutlery and all of that: are we doing enough in communicating with supermarkets and suppliers of supermarkets to make sure that produce is sold to people without being completely covered in plastic? This is a particular bugbear of mine, and I am just interested to know what work is being done in that space in communicating and getting buy-in from supermarkets and suppliers. For example, Tesco's organic range, bar, maybe, one or two items, is completely covered in plastic, even their bananas. It just happens that bananas come in a package of their own; they do not need to be in plastic. It is that kind of thing and the educational piece around that that I am interested in hearing a lot of work on.

Also, congratulations on your work on putting in place a report on the deposit return schemes. I just wondered about the likely outcome of that and when we are likely to see some positive action on that.

Helen Jones:

We often underestimate the difficulties in getting public buy-in for these policies, because, while there are huge advances to be made in green technologies and jobs to come from them, if we invest properly, we have to be honest and say that reducing carbon emissions requires some changes to our lifestyles as well. We are not necessarily being honest with people about cutting back flights, scrapping older cars and all sorts of things that they do not like. Even though they may support action in the abstract, when it impacts on them as individuals, as

you see with the London low-emissions zone, they do not like it. I think it is perhaps time that, as politicians, we started to engage and tell people the real truth about what is required to save the planet. It is not a no-cost issue. How do you think we can actually convince people of the real, desperate situation we are in and the need to make changes? You know, the fact that you can no longer, for example, expect all different kinds of fruits and vegetables to be flown around the world out of season, for instance, and that we are going to have to make real changes to our lifestyle.

10.30 am

Darren Millar AM:

Thank you, Co-Chair. Can I just put on record the fact that Wales has one of the highest household recycling rates in the world at the moment? It is something that we are very proud of, actually. It has taken a great deal of work to get there. I would also want to agree with the point that has just been made about needing to get the public to understand that they must participate and make an effort in trying to achieve the sort of change that I am sure we all aspire to.

One of the challenges that we have in Wales at the moment is that a number of local authorities have been looking at significantly reducing the frequency of the collection of residual household waste to the extent that, in some local authority areas, we are now at a one-in-four-weekly collection, which some members of the public feel is not frequent enough, and, of course, that then builds resentment amongst the public, who obviously want to take a lead in reducing their waste production but clearly feel a little bit let down sometimes when the pace of change is that significant.

I think the other big risk that we have, particularly in Wales and around our coasts, is obviously the rising sea levels that we have seen in recent years, and we have experienced some significant river and sea flooding in Wales over the past decade or so. I wonder to what extent the Irish Government are working with the insurance industry to make sure that there is affordable insurance in place for properties here in Ireland. The UK Government, through their discussions with the Association of British Insurers, has agreements in place through its Flood Re scheme, which usefully provides affordable insurance from a pool of insurers for people at risk of flooding, but unfortunately newer properties are not covered as part of that scheme. Clearly there needs to be a partnership between the insurance industry and the Government on investment in flood defences. I just wonder where the Irish Government are going on that particular issue.

Deputy Joan Burton:

I am just wondering, actually, whether the Minister, since he has taken on this responsibility, has become a vegan or, at least, a vegetarian, because I think, particularly among young people, attitudes to food are changing very rapidly, particularly in relation to meat and fish. Given that all of our countries have very large agricultural sectors, what do you see happening there? Your party has been involved particularly in expanding agricultural output, particularly in terms of meat, so what is the transition there and is it a just transition in terms of farmers?

The second thing is that, in relation to new technology, John Fitzgerald, the chair of the climate change council, was at pains to point out that if, for instance, people want to get their houses reassessed in order to retrofit them, the actual technological help is not there in a reliable way for consumers because we are not training people, and we're particularly not

training apprentices, in traditional crafts that would renovate houses in the new technologies. This is kind of a practical point.

It is almost impossible to get a reliable assessment, for instance, of the BER rating of a house that is believable. Sometimes people have to do it if they're selling a house and so on, but, actually, there's a total dearth of trained people and of, if you like, the building industry as a whole in relation to retrofitting and taking an actual programme of training young people to work in the new technologies and the retrofitting. The figure that you mentioned for retrofitting houses, the numbers are really high, and I think, for a lot of consumers, rather like practical issues — dealing with recycling, as was just mentioned — these are really core issues in how people are able to respond, as they wish to, to climate change.

Mr Richard Bruton TD:

First, in response to Neil Hamilton's question, the evaluation by the SRI does not show that carbon pricing is regressive, because, obviously, there are some very high-spending lifestyles that are carbon intensive as well. But that does not say that we have not to be acutely conscious of the burden that might occur on poorer people.

The commitment of the Government and, indeed, of the Oireachtas has been that the revenue from a carbon price should be entirely recycled, so the issue then is how do you balance that between a sort of a dividend to every individual versus support for particular carbon-abatement activities? And that balance will have to be struck. The Oireachtas said, "A balance needs to be struck", but it didn't strike a particular balance, and some parties regard it as it should be 100% one way and others regard it 100% the other way, but the truth is probably somewhere in between.

You are, of course, right about the free-rider. We could be a free-rider. We could all decide to be free-riders and abandon the attempt to stop this catastrophic impact that is going to happen to our planet. That could be an option we take. But I think that option would be so myopic and would be absolutely irresponsible. We have the obligation, I think, since we understand the science, since we have been the beneficiaries of a lot of the high-carbon methodologies that have been deployed, we have extra responsibility to carry our responsibilities and take this seriously, and the EU is doing that. There is a battle to be fought with other major countries to ensure that they come on board, but that is a battle that is absolutely worth fighting for, in my view.

I think if you listen to David Attenborough or Greta Thunberg, you see why this is a very, very high-stakes game. I think for us to throw in the towel and say, "We will give up the ghost, because there are others" —

Catherine's point is absolutely right: there is certainly a lot more we can do in the whole plastics area. Again, we have a bit of a love affair with plastics, where they are being used inefficiently. I think Europe is ambitious. It wants to eliminate all non-recyclable plastics. It perhaps isn't so ambitious in terms of reduction, and I think that's where we can work with suppliers — and not just the supermarkets but the whole supply chain — to ensure that plastic is less used; when it is used, it's not single use; and when it is recycled, it goes to productive outlets. We are seeing change occurring. Some companies are now committing that all of their containers will be made, not from virgin plastic, as was the case in the past, but from recycled plastic. So, we have a big battle on our hands that we have to continue to fight.

I think Helen Jones is absolutely right: this is a huge conversion. I know religion has gone out of fashion, but it is like a conversion; it is like a new set of beliefs that we have to adopt. How

do you do it? I mean, I think leading by example. If we are not seen to make the changes within the public service, within our own areas of influence, if we are not out there influencing our supply chain, influencing those who deal with us, we will not do it.

Information is key, and you do see young people, who are more exposed to information, have adopted a much different attitude. I think that using that power of younger people to influence their elders was huge in our own, if you like, constitutional change. It was the influence of a younger generation on the generation that went before.

This is not easy, and you are absolutely right: we do underestimate it, and I think we have not even thought through the sort of things that we need to do, and honesty and information is key to it. If it becomes the elite versus the ordinary person, we are lost, you know?

I think Darren is right and, indeed, Joan: there is a lot of, you know, getting the practical things that people can do — to getting those ducks in a line — are going to be absolutely crucial in this: to get them have the right information. Like, I know today, two thirds of the plastics that people in good faith put into the green bin are not recyclable. You know, the truth is we do not have very good information out there. People are doing what they think is right and that is the difficulty that we face.

We have the same problem, I think, on flood insurance as you do. We have done an exercise in 300 locations in which there is flood risk, and there is a continuing battle to get the insurance companies to reinsure and to insure where works have been done, and I would say if you talk to Michael D'Arcy, he might be able to fill you in.

Joan is right, of course, people are changing dramatically their choices, and I think that is influencing every household. I suppose we have always taken the view that you need a balanced diet. I think that has been the approach. Fish on Fridays was absolutely normal here and when it was recently in a green schools initiative, people took exception to the fact that one day might be meatless. But we are on a journey in that area, too, and I think you will see massive changes and that will influence the supply chain. You already see that happening. And you are also right in that, you know, this will call for, you know, apprenticeships. And I think that is a positive story because there is a lot of displacement happening in traditional areas where we would have had apprenticeships, and we need to see that we evolve the apprenticeships in these areas where new opportunity is emerging.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

OK. Thank you. We still have a lot of people wanting to ask questions, so I will take two more rounds in which there will be five or so in each round and then we will have to close it. So, no more new questions. Only those that have already indicated.

Deputy Al Brouard:

We are a small island in the English Channel with some low-lying coast. And I think Lord Empey, in effect, has asked my question already, so as a follow-up and touches on Mr Hamilton's points: how do we square the circle with our imports — cars, clothing, washing machines? In effect, are we not being the free ride the Minister speaks of, as the resulting carbon and pollution is on other countries' tariffs, yet we dutifully do, or attempt to do, our bit, but on a very small slice of the overall carbon cake?

Deputy Eamon Scanlon:

I thank the Minister for his presentation. My question is related to Lord Empey and Neil Hamilton. On a recent visit to China, we visited Shanghai and while the weather was good in

that city — it was a sunny day, we think — you could not see the sun. The people went about their business with their nose and mouths covered for three days. And then we compare that to the European countries. And I understand fully that Europe has to be seen to deal with this issue — climate change — but is it fair that the citizens of Europe are going to be taxed to compensate for these heavy industrialised countries like China? I think it is very unfair and I think that we should start there with those countries. I know we have responsibilities, but I think those countries have greater responsibility to try and resolve the problem at the moment, as far as I can see. Thank you.

Jayne Bryant AM:

I would like to echo Darren Millar's point around the recycling rates in Wales. We are third in the world for recycling rates, but it is important we do not let up. Have you looked at what Wales is doing on recycling and have you learned anything from that?

I think eminent scientists have been telling us for the last 20 years that we would be reaching this tipping point that we are now and we really have not done enough. We have tinkered round the edges and we have not listened, and I think it is really important that we do take note now and do take action.

I think Joan's point about young people and vegetarianism and veganism —. I mean, it is interesting now: you go to many restaurants and you see vegan choices on menus, which is quite startling these days. We have to have difficult decisions with people and industry, but it is really important. Years ago, you did not have meat at every single meal, and I think that the type of quality that we have as well is important if people do continue to eat meat.

And on plastics, as Catherine has said, you know, David Attenborough has really brought this to the fore, but we know that we have to stop plastics at a government level in terms of businesses and the supply chain. Are there any conversations between Governments to see what can be done to seriously tackle this? We are all recycling and asking people to recycle, but you have to do this at a top level to stop the amount of plastics in our countries.

10.45 am

Deputy Brendan Smith:

[Break in sound for a moment.]

[Inaudible] discussions, including here this morning, that massive financial investment is needed if we are to implement essential and urgently needed climate action measures. As we know, the European Investment Bank funds a wide array of capital investment projects across the European Union: can the Minister indicate whether any consideration is being given to expanding the remit of the European Investment Bank and establishing a new climate change-focused bank that could fund projects, particularly transition projects, at a favourable interest rate? It would help to create a focus on the need for major investment and give some impetus to important measures.

Mr Richard Bruton TD:

First, on the question of whether we are being a free rider by simply importing goods, I do not think that that is the case. Every country in the model, if you like, is adopting to reducing its target and has set reduction trajectories. Some people will be manufacturing, and some will be consuming, but, once each country sets about decarbonising its manufacturing process or its food production process, we are getting the outcome. It is a question of having a multilateral deal, where those who are producer countries and those who are consumer

countries are each taking up initiatives to decarbonise. As I said to Reg Empey, there are funds where we contribute in order to support some of the adaptation in countries that find it difficult.

I do not agree with Eamon that we should start with the later developers, who have a big pollution problem. That is, certainly, very in-your-face evidence of the difficulties that they have in their reliance on, particularly, coal and fossil fuels, but saying that those who are late developers should carry the can while the wealthier countries, who have alternatives open to them, would not be equitable. We must seek to have reduction plans in different countries that reflect their opportunities to reduce and find decarbonised pathways for those individual countries, and, I suppose, that is what we are trying to do. The pressure from Paris is that each of us in our own areas of responsibility would seek to evolve those strategies. If we start thinking that someone else should do more than we should, the system will fall apart. “From each according to its capacity” is the principle but under a very strict monitoring of what they do and that they have serious attention to the issue.

I will look at Wales and recycling. I do not know what formula they have adopted. We are not too bad, but we are not top of the league either, so we have plenty to learn from.

To be fair to the EU, it has created a cross-Government forum on plastics, and there is ambition to take out non-recyclable plastics, to eliminate single-use plastics. There is ambition. It is they who have driven the collective target to bring our recycling of plastics up to 55%; typically, here it is about 35%. It is a collective EU coming together that is driving those ambitions, and we need policies to underpin those ambitions.

Brendan is absolutely right: there is real scope for the European Investment Bank to be part of green finance. The Government of Ireland have issued a bond, which was massively oversubscribed, that will be used solely for green projects. There will be demand then to monitor those projects and show that they are impacting. That is really encouraging to see: the financial industry is starting to demand that sort of future-proofing of their investments and is assigning money to green investments at a lower rate. There are some signs for hope there, but a lot more work is to be done on creating a genuinely smart finance model for green activity.

Deputy Declan Breathnach:

Minister, the tax take on carbon fuels is obviously a major source of revenue in this country — in most countries. Where do you see the tax shift in terms of the loss of those revenues, as we reduce carbon fuels? The public, who are looking for and want to see change, are also asking what happens. Obviously, car transport is a major issue: as we move to technology like electric cars, people ask, “Where do you go with the trade-in in five years’ time?”. Have you looked at those two issues? While people, ultimately, want to support climate change, it all depends on the availability of money in their pocket. Have you looked at those two issues?

Viscount Bridgeman:

This rather takes up a point of Jayne Bryant on vegetarianism. In that remarkable programme of David Attenborough about three weeks ago — I am sure many colleagues saw it — it finished up with a direct challenge to individuals: what can they do? The most tangible thing is, in fact, to become a vegetarian. That will not be particularly good news for the Irish beef industry, and has that been factored in?

John Scott:

I declare an interest as a farmer. I would like to see a more holistic approach taken to agriculture. There is almost a lazy shorthand out there at the moment to blame agriculture, which I do not think is justified. It is, in part, the way the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) system of measurement gives not enough credit to agriculture and to land managers. If one plants 50 acres of trees, for example, that is not credited to the farmer or the land manager. If one restores a peat bog, that is not credited to agriculture or the farmer. If one allows a wind farm onto your farm, that is not credited to an individual farmer. There needs to be a parallel system almost that reflects a more holistic approach to the contribution made by agriculture and the land use choices of individual farmers. I would just like you to consider that, Minister.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick:

Minister, thanks for coming before the Assembly and addressing us today. First of all, I welcome the UK being the first in the world to declare a climate emergency and Ireland becoming the second country to declare a climate emergency.

Minister, I agree with your statement that this is the greatest challenge facing humanity, and I think we all know that. The Irish Government have given a commitment to reduce dependence on fossil fuels from 70% to 30% by 2030, and you have also said that these fuels are an essential part of the transition. You also said that Ireland was getting its fuel through our country network, rather than being dependent on gas from other countries. Minister, could you elaborate on that?

Also, the Dáil Committee on Climate Action recommends an increase in the existing carbon tax from €20 to €80 per ton in 2030. The Citizens' Assembly last year published a report with recommendations on how the state can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change. What do you think about those recommendations, Minister?

Senator Gerry Horkan:

A lot of the points have been covered, but it is clear from the number of people wanting to contribute that it is a very important topic. Thank you, Minister, for being here.

I think it's fair to say that Irish society is more than willing to play its part — things like the plastic bag tax, pay by weight. I was a councillor, and I remember you could not even put plastics in the recycling bin until, maybe, the mid-2000s. We have come a long way, but do we not have to almost ban certain types of plastic? If it is not recyclable, can we not just say, "You can't supply unrecyclable plastics"? We still have takeaways giving out burgers in polystyrene boxes, in some places, that are completely, to my knowledge, unrecyclable.

I was hoping you might be able to indicate the level of fines Ireland will pay from, I think, next year, when we fail to meet our emissions targets.

I was canvassing on Friday in Greystones, which is close to here, and a man who is still using single-glazed steel windows said, "I can get a grant towards house insulation for attics and walls, but I can't get anything for windows". He is almost waiting until the Government do something on that. Is it not the case that we should incentivise? I accept the point that Government cannot do everything, but the Government should incentivise behaviour towards improving the insulation in your house, towards better windows.

A big debate that is very controversial — it's just a final point — is in terms of our settlement strategy. When Simon Coveney was the Minister for Housing, back in 2016 — I was only just in the Seanad — he pointed out that Ireland, in 2015, I think, had built 13,000 houses, of

which 7,000 were one-offs and 6,000 were in estates. Now, clearly a one-off house is an aspiration for many people, and lots of people need to live in a one-off house. Many people want to live in a one-off house, but it is more demanding on the environment in terms of transport, the efficiency of delivering services and so on. Is that being looked at in terms of how we tackle the challenge of climate change?

Mr Richard Bruton TD:

There are quite a few there. Declan Breathnach asked the \$64,000 question: “If we are successful in weaning people off fossil fuels, where will the replacement funding be found?”. That is one that will be a challenge for Ministers for Finance over the coming years; there is no doubt about that. We generate a lot of money from excise on fuels in respect of which the objective is to wean them out of our system. I do not have an answer. It is, of course, a question that will exercise the Department of Finance.

At this stage, the trade-in of higher-carbon vehicles has not become an issue, but there is no doubt that one of the reasons why people should look seriously is that the trade-in value of those will fall as carbon prices rise. They will have a lower trade-in value. As I said, if you take a whole-of-life view of a lot of the investments, they are positive.

There is no doubt that vegetarianism will have an impact on Irish agriculture. In a lot of Irish agriculture — dairy and pork, in particular, and, to some degree, in beef — we regard ourselves as more carbon-efficient in producing products than any other European country. One of the really strong demands will be that agriculture becomes much more carbon-efficient in those, and there are some very good exemplars of people who farm in methods that keep down their footprint. As a subsequent speaker said, a lot of the activities that farmers undertake, such as planting forestry — I know there is talk, under the CAP, of more obligations on individual farmers to plant — do not get an immediate credit in the way the system now works. There will be a need for new metrics for the evaluation of land use as we go along.

It does mean that there will be less beef sold, and that is the reality of what faces agriculture. Like any other sector, it has to respond to those changes. It has to find opportunities that will still give a good family farm income in that changed environment that will come from the demand side and, indeed, from the supply side as the price of carbon goes up.

The issue that Peter raises about whether we should stop all exploration off Irish coasts and, as the Corrib field runs out, not aim to have any new supply replace it I do not believe makes sense. If we can have a domestic supply that supplements Corrib as it retreats, it gives us more energy supply security. It also recognises that, even in 2030, we will still have 30% of our electricity fuelled by fossil fuels. We are better having a domestic source than seeking to rely on other sources, be it Russian oligarchs or Arab sheikhs, for our sources of fuel. That is, I know, an issue of some contention, but that is my view on it: stopping exploration does not reduce carbon by one ounce; it just cuts us off from a particular source of supply.

11.00 am

Gerry is right about banning certain plastics. I think you will see bans increasingly. There will be a ban on non-recyclable plastics. You will see the ban on single-use plastics. And I think that noose will tighten as we go along, but I suppose one has to do it in a way where you do not have downsides on the other side. You could have a significant problem with food waste if you did not have some of this material. Unfortunately, composites are being used as being good for preserving food and travelling distances, but they have their downside. This is

a balance we have to strike, and, again, it is one where we need to just evaluate these policies. You are absolutely right; there is going to be more regulation in this sector.

As for the fines, I think we will expect it be about 16 million tons off our targets, so whatever price — I think some of those have already been purchased, so we have them in the bank, so to speak, but there will be some purchasing to be done if we do not hit our targets. I think you are right: the settlement strategy has to be sustainable, and that is why moving away from Dublin and trying to develop Cork, Galway, Waterford and Limerick in a compact way around identifiable sites in a way that looks at sustainability in travel, work and all those patterns is going to be crucial, as you rightly say.

As I said, on the issue of retrofitting homes, I think we are going to have to find aggregated models. We are going to have to be able to do it on a greater scale, rather than individual grants and waiting for people to take those up. I think that will be too slow and too expensive, and we need to find new models under which we can do that.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Okay, we have one final question, and that is Cathal Boylan.

Mr Cathal Boylan:

Thank you, Co-Chair, and I thank the Minister for his presentation. Just two quick points. Minister, in terms of your approach to working with business partners — the likes of local authorities, universities and also private business — what is your approach there? Is it legislative, is it investment or will it be incentives?

Also, I know there has been a lot of talk about single-use plastics, but we have a throwaway culture in society. The issue of single use expands further than plastics, and I know it is one of the most dangerous. There are coffee cups and other items. I am just wondering, are you going to bring that factor in and look at it as well in the single use/overall use? Okay, thank you very much.

Mr Richard Bruton TD:

I think forming partnerships is going to be the most important thing, whether it be community partnerships — we now have, I think, 256 community partnerships who look at how they can decarbonise in their community. We want to move to 1,500 of them. In the same way, in every sector we need to see sectors take on board a decarbonisation strategy. We have, I think, a lot of pioneers. Fifty companies signed up to a decarbonisation strategy, but they are pioneers. We need to see that embedded in sectors.

We aim to use Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland; people who have a track record in supporting networked improvements across sectors. We aim to try and use those to help from those networks, but I think it will be back to sectors. Sectors need to recognise that the industry that they are in is not going to be the same industry in 10, 15 years' time as it is today, and it is those who recognise the change and the journey they have to make are the ones who will be successful. SEAI, Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, has multiple schemes and supports, be it for dairy or for high energy users. There are a lot of networks formed, but we need to just embed them and they need to be made more ambitious.

There will be carrot and stick, you know, there is no doubt about it. It will be a mixture of both. And you are right about disposal. This whole issue around waste is going to be central. There probably isn't a lot of low-hanging fruit. It is not going to be the cheapest way to reduce carbon, but it is absolutely a way where people understand they are starting on the

pathway to convert their lifestyle, which is absolutely essential to this journey. I think the waste area is where people understand easiest, and we need to build off that, but there will be obligations such as higher charges for those who generate certain types of packaging. So there will be penalties, as well as regulatory changes like the banning of single-use plastics. The ones that are particularly vulnerable to getting into the oceans are the ones that are on the list for immediate banning.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Ladies and gentlemen, that concludes our session with Minister Bruton. Minister, thank you for your incredible contribution today; you've answered a huge array of questions from a vast number of Members of our Assembly on a huge amount of different topics, and I think it's been extremely enlightening and useful, and I'd like to thank you on behalf of the Assembly for doing everything you can to champion the need for change that will benefit future generations of both our countries. So, thank you very much. *[Applause.]*

Because of the popularity of that session, you'll notice that we have overrun, but we are still going to allow you to have a short coffee break, so, please, could you all be back here by 11 *[Inaudible.]*

The sitting was suspended at 11.06 am and resumed at 11.31 am.

CLIMATE ACTION AND ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I would like to invite Laura Burke, director of Environmental Protection Agency, to give her address to the Assembly.

Ms Laura Burke (Environmental Protection Agency):

Thank you very much, Co-Chair and, I think, lords, ladies and gentlemen. It is rare I have to say that, but I am delighted to be here this morning. I will just talk a little about the Irish Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and our role. Then I would like to talk about climate change, national greenhouse gas emissions — the Minister has touched on that to a certain extent — and maybe give you some of the evidence and science behind that. Then, what, I thought, would be interesting in the context of the group here today is talk about public perceptions of climate change and some of the work that we do to engage with people on climate action. I will, of course, be happy to take any questions that you might have.

First of all, just about the EPA, we are an independent public body, but our powers and responsibilities are set down in legislation. We have a wide range of functions, broadly covering the topics of regulation, knowledge and advocacy for the environment. As you can see here, our mission is to protect and improve the environment as a valuable asset for the people of Ireland and to protect our people and the environment from the harmful effects of radiation and pollution. For us and, just hearing the discussion this morning, it sounds as if it rings true with this audience, Ireland's natural environment not only has an intrinsic value in its own right but is a key strategic asset for the country. It is core to healthy lives, our national competitiveness and successful businesses. It provides many raw materials essential for business, whether that be clean water, clean air, minerals, soils, biodiversity etc, and therefore a balanced and respectful — i.e. sustainable — coexistence with our environment is essential. Climate change presents significant risk to that balance but, of course, also presents opportunities.

As I said, we have a wide range of roles with regard to climate change, but one of the roles that we have is to produce a “State of the environment” report every four years. This really looks at the situation with regard to Ireland’s environment and what are the key challenges. The latest report that was published was in 2016. That identified seven key environmental actions for Ireland, and, unsurprisingly, climate change was one of those actions. For us, with regard to climate change, I think it is recognised that we are approaching the end of the fossil age and now fully understand the consequences of the large-scale consumption of coal, oil and gas over the past two centuries for the future health and well-being of our people and our planet. Humanity, of course, has benefited hugely from fossil fuels but at very significant cost, and the greatest irony is that those that benefited least from fossil fuel use are those who will suffer most from human-induced climate change. We must now, with a much greater sense of urgency, make the transition from a society and economy dependent on fossil fuels and wasteful consumption of natural resources to one that uses renewables and clean energy and places much greater care and attention on our use of precious and non-renewable natural resources. Therefore, transformational change is urgently needed across energy, transport, agriculture, manufacturing and domestic sectors, which will affect how we work, how we live, how we travel, how we heat our homes, produce our food and our purchasing power as consumers and citizens.

With regard to Ireland’s policy — the Minister alluded to it — we have a national policy position on climate change, and that was adopted in 2015. That, really, is divided into two areas: first is a commitment to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by at least 80% across electricity generation, the built environment and transport sectors by 2050, and, in parallel to that, an approach to carbon neutrality in the agriculture and land use sector. I suppose I always point to that national policy position because that is what we, as citizens of Ireland and Government of Ireland, have committed to doing. It is not kind of an unnecessary burden or something imposed on us by others. Of course, we have European and international commitments as well.

Another key role the EPA has with regard to climate change and greenhouse gases is to do the national inventories and projections on an annual basis. We produce those inventories, effectively looking backwards at the emissions that we released, and projections looking forward. They provide the evidence base year on year to enable national planning to take place by government and by others.

So, where are we? The most recent emissions inventories that we produced was for 2017, and that indicated that, in Ireland, we emitted around 60.74 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent. The interesting thing here, I suppose, is that agriculture, transport and energy make up around 73% of emissions in Ireland, which is different to other countries. Agriculture is a bigger piece of the emissions pie in Ireland compared with other countries, basically due to the relative size of our population and other sectors. The UK, Germany and France have much larger national herds than Ireland, but the proportion of emissions from agriculture is lower in those countries, as the human population and associated emissions from other sectors is much higher. Although our national herd is smaller, the percentage of emissions is higher. The other one to point to is residential emissions, as in emissions from houses, at just under 10%.

Comparing Ireland with other countries across the EU, I thought, in particular, it would be useful to compare us with the United Kingdom. Ireland is one of the worst performing countries in the EU in per capita emission terms. When you exclude methane — agricultural emissions, effectively — we’d be closer to the EU average, and, again, just looking at the slide, you see that the UK is also closer to the EU average. It just shows you the impact of our

agricultural emissions on not only the overall emissions but the per capita emissions in Ireland.

I do not intend to go through this graph in any great detail, but it just shows you the four stages in emissions growth and decline in Ireland over the last number of years. Stage 1 was in the early 1990s up to the early 2000s, where emissions increased as a consequence of economic and population growth. The population of the Republic of Ireland has gone from around 3.5 million up to 4.7 million, and, with economic and population growth, emissions increased. Between 2001 and 2008, there was slight decline in emissions due to some successful decoupling, particularly in the energy sector but also, to a certain extent, in the agriculture sector. Emissions reduced slightly. The next stage was 2008 to 2014, and that is really the recession. It really shows you that emissions and economic growth are inextricably linked and we have not managed to decouple, because emissions dramatically reduced and then went fairly flat during the recession. Then, from 2015 onwards, we see little evidence of decoupling, because, as the economy recovers, emissions are growing again. Looking out to 2030/2040, under the best-case scenario with actions that are currently committed to or anticipated to be committed to, you are looking at reductions of around only 9%, so certainly not large-scale reductions currently predicted.

I will look briefly at the three main sectors. Agriculture, as I said, is a huge sector: around a third of the emissions in Ireland. It peaked in the late 1990s. It did reduce. It has been growing in the last five or six years, mainly due to an increase in cattle numbers. Between 2012 and 2017, dairy cow numbers have increased by 26%, and you see an increase in emissions associated with that. Projections out to the future are there will be a small amount of growth but stabilising, with no reduction seen in emissions. Overall, emissions are slightly below 1990 levels but, in fact, are growing at the moment.

With the energy industry, there have been a lot more ups and downs. You see that emissions increased up to 2000 — back again to economic growth, population growth — and then a significant decrease down to 2017. Really, that was due to decoupling, more use of gas over coal and peat, but we still see that peat and coal are expected to continue to have an impact on our emissions. Even for 2017, I would say that there was a reduction in emissions: a lot of that was due to the non-use of the one very large-scale power plant, Moneypoint, for a number of months during the year. That had a significant impact on emissions in the energy sector. Looking out to the future, it is anticipated, on the basis of existing predicted measures, that we will be talking about a reduction of around 24% out to 2030. That really is dependent on the closure of Moneypoint power plant, the coal-fired power plant. Without that, it will not happen.

Lastly, I will just look to transport emissions. This is probably similar to you overall in the UK. Transport emissions are absolutely linked to economic growth. They decreased when there was a recession, and they have increased over the last number of years. There was a small decrease in transport emissions in 2017, but this was mainly due to reduced fuel tourism. There is fuel tourism between Northern Ireland and southern Ireland. I suppose, certainly, we in the EPA would say that the way of reducing emissions is not having reduced fuel tourism; we actually need to take action within the Republic on reducing our transport emissions, rather than relying on the purchasing power, or not, of our northern colleagues buying diesel down south.

That is it overall on the emissions, but where does that leave us? I suppose the main thing from this slide is just to highlight that, with regard to the national policy position, we would need, in 2030, to be out at 5 million tons per annum for electricity generation, built

environment and transport. The sooner we act, the fewer emission reductions per year we will need; the longer we leave it, the much more significant reductions you will need. It is a much greater challenge, the longer you leave it.

Trying just to talk about some common challenges and opportunities, I think there are geographical challenges and commonalities where islands in the North Atlantic were at major risk from sea-level rise and weather changes. There is a high importance of adaptation. With regard to technical, we need to decarbonise energy, transport, residential systems. Governance: oversight of climate action, but we need action at both central government level, local, business, communities etc. We also need, in the context of economic, to recognise opportunities of decarbonising our economy. Agriculture and food are important to our economy, but also, I think, very important both north and south. Social and political: there is the social acceptance of a need for change and Brexit.

On the energy systems, we need to undergo major transformation in the coming decades, and the Minister talked about that this morning. There is a similar challenge for many other European countries and wider. We are committed to doing that through increasing electricity generation through renewables and reducing energy demand through efficiency measures and are committed to doing this without the development of nuclear.

On transport, we need to support a shift from the private car, particularly in cities, and there are win-win opportunities there with both congestion and air quality. We need a more proactive and systematic approach to land use and transport planning, and the private car increasingly into the future will become more electric; we need to make sure that the energy generated is renewable to power those cars as well.

11.45 am

On agriculture, we need to be able to demonstrate that it is as carbon and climate efficient as possible. We need to build on advantages like our natural grass-fed system of farming. Land should be net sink for carbon, and it will require changes in land use practices, particular in peaty areas, again it has already been alluded to this morning, and much more tree planting. And this also provides benefits for things like water quality, air quality and nature, so there are a number of win-wins in a number of these actions.

And, as I said, I just wanted to talk about communications and public perceptions of climate change, and, again, just listening to the discussions this morning, I think this has really come out of how do we engage with regard to the climate and the climate challenge. Ireland experienced an extraordinary time during 2017/2018 where our environment, our climate, reminded us of the fragile nature of our infrastructure, our economy and our food production systems and, of course, by extension, our well-being. A year where nature reminded us of who is in charge and which focused us on what we need to do to stop aggravating the situation and to adapt. This was not only the situation in Ireland, so I am sure that it will resonate with many of you also. It started in September 2017 with storms. In October, we had more storms and we had an ex-hurricane. December, even more storms; January, we'd record rain; March 2018, we'd snow and storms and April was the wettest on many records. Then in May, June and July, we had prolonged drought and heatwave. And the accumulative costs to our economy are still being calculated but estimates of 1.5 billion euros have been reported for the October 2017 storms alone. There is no doubt but that the resilience of our infrastructure, our economy, our health systems were severally tested. For us, we saw the drinking water systems were knocked out, waste water treatment systems knocked out, power lost, roads became impassable, sea defences damaged, homes and businesses inundated, primary food production activities badly compromised, healthcare services put under severe

pressure etc. What we do know is that with our changing climate, the confident predictions are that we can expect such extreme events at greater frequency into the future and both the economic and the social costs of those as well as the environmental costs.

Coincidentally, 2018 was a turning point, I certainly believe, in the minds of the public and sectors and as regards to what needs to be done to build and ensure resilience. Mitigation is essential; adaptation is equally essential. Anything less is unsustainable. Indeed, irresponsible, given what we now know about the impacts of climate change. Through this challenging year, coincidentally, Ireland set out some of the most ambitious plans and undertook activities that are intended to mitigate the climate challenge, raise awareness and transition our nation to a low carbon and sustainable society and economy. Again, a number of these were mentioned, including the report of the Citizens' Assembly. We'd a national adaptation framework; national mitigation plan; a national development plan that included a 500-million euro climate investment fund; the climate council had a number of reports, on which I sit, and now what we are looking at is an all of government climate plan being developed.

So, by any measure it has been a transformative time with regard to climate policy. However, the greater of the policy challenges are now facing us and that is ensuring committed, coherent, competent and relentless implementation of these plans and policy measures, as otherwise they are just writing on paper. So, we need to translate the aspiration into action on the ground.

I'd just thought I'd show some of the pictures here of climate protests in Ireland and students protesting looking for climate action. Also, at the top there, you will see the Mansion House in Dublin. The EPA hosts a number of climate lectures by international speakers and these are always sold out, with up to 600 people attending, which shows the level of interest that members of the public have in hearing more about climate.

We, as citizens, need to take to personal responsibility into the transition required. It is the work and protection at local level, the recognition of common good and the fostering of trust that contribute significantly to the overall state of the environment. State bodies, such as my own, involved in environmental protection have a key role to play in supporting homes and business and communities in adopting low carbon and sustainable practices through fiscal measures, regulatory interventions and education and awareness. But to make any substantial social progress on many of the environmental and sustainability challenges that we see, we need widespread, willing public engagement and participation at individual business and community level.

So, targets and limits and standards we now recognise are no longer sufficient. We need people to want to do this; to work with us to unfold what we consider to be a new normal. Part of the work of the EPA in this area is the National Dialogue on Climate Action, and the Minister alluded to this earlier. This is really only at what I suppose I would describe as an "embryonic stage"; it has only really started. This dialogue is there to create awareness and understanding and engagement on climate change to motivate and enable citizens and to empower citizens to express their hopes and concerns, and ultimately to inform policy on climate. So, it has really just started.

It has a work programme, and here are just some of the events that have been happening with regard to the dialogue. It is about regional gatherings, so meeting in places like Athlone or Tralee — outside Dublin, because a lot happens within Dublin. It is also about having local gatherings — the climate lectures that I mentioned. We are recruiting climate champions and ambassadors. People were talking about young people earlier, working with the likes of

ECO-UNESCO on young environmentalist awards. We in the EPA are also focusing our research programme on climate, including topics on engagement — the social sciences behind climate — and we're also holding a national climate change conference, which, in fact, is happening later this week.

I have had people say to me, "Oh, well sure look everyone knows the climate and they know the challenge and, you know, etc, so why do things like a dialogue?" So, just to give you some of the feedback that we've had from the initial events in the dialogue: 70% of participants felt they better understood the challenge and opportunities with the transition to a low carbon economy; 70 % felt more aware of climate action initiatives that were happening in their region; 90% felt more inspired to take action; and 92% felt that the gatherings enabled them to express their hopes and concerns and ideas. So, there is a strong desire to facilitate these types of discussions and engagement at a local level. So, as I said, this is just the start of it, and we have an active programme now for the year.

So that is really all I was going to say. Really, I suppose, for me, in conclusion, we are at a tipping point in climate action in Ireland. I believe there are a lot of opportunities to learn from and work with others, and also there are lots of win-wins in tackling climate change. This is the cartoon I always show, particularly if there's people maybe who are slightly sceptical in the audience: even if it was all a big hoax, which I'd hope that none of us believe, there are so many win-wins in tackling climate change, whether that's green jobs, renewables, liveable cities etc, it's something that we should be doing anyway. Thank you very much. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Thank you, Laura. I have a number of questioners.

Deputy Declan Breathnach:

Thank you, Chair. Thank you for your presentation, Laura. We all know that water, air and wildlife, be it on land or sea, know no boundaries. My question relates to climate change but particularly in relation to Brexit, which we all know, in any form, will interfere and place an obstacle by way of the environment, particularly if there is any diversions in standards between North and South. Would you comment on that in view of a recent report by the Environmental Pillar and Northern Ireland Environment Link in relation to the dangers if divergence is to occur and the implications that would have for the all-Ireland economy, particularly our environment?

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Laura, I'm just going to take a few if that's OK.

Lord Dubs:

Thank you, Co-Chair, and thank you for a very interesting presentation. You mentioned a number of times how ordinary people were becoming more aware of what the issues are. The question is, if I go home and I'm asked what have I learned here, I would like to know, and I think a lot of people would like to know, what specific action we as citizens can take. You know, OK, not drive motor cars and all — there are some obvious ones, but there are quite a lot of others which may be a bit beyond us. I wonder whether there is any way of giving more guidance to ordinary citizens as to how we can play our part.

Pauline McNeill:

Thank you very much. I wanted to ask about the public transport sector and obligations to reduce emissions. It is in relation to public perceptions. Obviously, I am from Scotland. I represent Glasgow, so I can give you only that perspective, but I would be interested to hear your comment on it.

There is potentially a lot of pain for ordinary people here if they are expected to give up private car use. Even in parts of a city like Glasgow, you cannot get a bus to your work. Our train service is completely unreliable. It is the bone of contention amongst all the parties. It is extortionate. To travel a 50-minute journey at peak time from Glasgow to Edinburgh is equivalent to — well, it is £25 — about €27. An awful lot of work will have to be done to convince the general public of the pain involved in giving up their cars, even in cities. Governments will have to commit to very significant investment in infrastructure.

I will finish by saying that post the recession — and I thought your figures on how the recession impacted on economic growth were really interesting — families across the UK are certainly still hurting from the pain of the recession. Middle-income families are struggling to make ends meet. Lots of people have old cars and they have old cars because it is cheaper for them to get to work. So all this talk about reducing emissions: there is going to be a huge gulf and confusing messages. At the weekend, I discovered that the road tax system has completely changed. It used to be that if you had a low-emission car — now, obviously, we are not talking about electric vehicles here, so it is £145 regardless of the low emissions of your car. We are actually going back 20 years. A lot of drivers in the room might remember that diesel was, at one time, regarded as better. Now, that has completely changed. So there are lots of confusing messages from Governments. I am concerned that there is going to be a huge gulf, particularly in the area of public transport, if Governments do not agree that there needs to be public transport infrastructure investment first before we ask people to go through the pain of giving up their private cars.

Ms Laura Burke:

OK. Declan, just on Brexit and divergence of standards. The Minister has, I suppose, answered this as well. Certainly, from talking to colleagues in Northern Ireland, Wales, England, Scotland — because we meet as heads of environment agencies on a regular basis — my understanding is that there is no plan for any divergence of standards and, in fact, a 25-year environment plan has been put in place. If there is divergence of standards, I think there is significant risk, but I think that we should all aim to set the bar high with regard to environmental standards.

On the actions and guidance that were mentioned, and what we as individual citizens can do, that is part of the dialogue; to start to talk about those things, because there are different things that different people can do depending on where you are. There are definitely things, I suppose, for us, such as retrofitting houses. I was just talking earlier about social houses. Certainly, there are actions that can happen there. There is also an issue about taking public transport where we can — I will get on to public transport in a minute — and, again, this idea of diet. Certainly, I am not a health professional and I will not be saying that everybody should go vegan, but there is a piece about how much meat we eat. Everything in moderation. Are there small actions that each of us can take? There tends to be lots of small things that we can do.

On public transport, this is a bugbear of mine: public transport needs to be an exemplar. I can talk only about the Irish situation, where we still have diesel buses going around Dublin. There is a commitment post-July to have no more diesel-only buses. That does not mean that we will not have diesel buses: it will be no diesel-only buses. We need to be far more

ambitious with regard to public transport. If we are asking others to move to electric vehicles etc, then the public sector needs to be an exemplar on this. Public transport needs to be available, easy and accessible.

Noon

In a way, it is comparable. I remember in the early '90s, with regard to the waste sector in Ireland, we were landfilling 90% of our waste in local dumps outside towns and villages in the country. We have completely transformed that. What we did was, although charges were imposed on people — rightly or wrongly, waste charges were imposed — there were options. You were able to go to your local recycling bin; you were able to use your second bin at home etc. You made things accessible and easy for people as alternatives to use. If we want people on public transport, it has to be that way. As I said, we need to be much more ambitious with regard to what public transport should look like. When I look at the likes of London moving to electric buses etc, I think that is something that we certainly should look at in the Republic of Ireland.

The recession is still hurting, and you probably see in Ireland as well that, although emissions are saying, “Economy growing” — it is growing — there is an urban/rural divide. I say that as somebody born in Dublin but living in the countryside. You will have people in the rural areas saying, “We’re not seeing the benefits of economic recovery”, and I think it is valid. We need to ask how you rebalance so that not all of the wealth is in a small part of a country, whether that is Dublin or London or wherever. Sorry, that was a long answer.

Connétable Simon Crowcroft:

We declared a climate change emergency two weeks ago. It was brought to our Assembly by a Back-Bencher. The Minister’s amendment to delay a report back until next year was defeated, and one Member of our Assembly voted against it.

I was very impressed with your presentation. Thank you very much. I really wanted to ask what jurisdictions like ours, starting out on this journey to address the climate change emergency, can do to benefit from what you do. You said you were at the start of the journey, but you are, clearly, further ahead than the States of Jersey are. Do you produce a toolkit that we could use? Do you have roving ambassadors? The Chanel Islands have, in the past, tended to rely overly on consultants, and we do not really want to be fleeced by another group of environmental consultants if there are good examples of this work already happening.

Delyth Jewell AM:

You spoke about the need for urgency with the public. How do you think we can keep up the sense of urgency and goodwill with the public as a constant? When photographs first emerged of islands of plastic in the oceans, people were shocked and horrified, but humanity is very adaptable and can become complacent. How do you think we can stop people from becoming complacent and how can we engage people who maybe do not see the urgency as pertaining to them or us at the moment? Secondly, we were speaking during the break about the fact that Wales has legislation that puts obligations on current Government to look at the impact of policies on future generations: do you think that that should be replicated elsewhere?

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh:

A bugbear of mine in relation to planning is that there is a lot of building — if you go into Dublin now, you’ll see the cranes starting again — but there is no minimum standard in terms

of electricity points for public transport. Unless that happens, you will get buildings going up with no points for cars or other vehicles. That is one of the disincentives for people who are in business. I was talking to an electrician the other day. Most of his work is in Dublin, but sometimes it is outside in the country. He will not buy an electric van, because, he says, if he is driving down the country, he has nowhere to pull in. If you go from Dublin to Cork, no service stations and none of the lay-bys along the motorway have power points for people to pull in. Unless we get that aspect of the network in place, there is a disincentive.

The other point you mentioned was in relation to divergence between the islands. As far as I know, the Government here have taken the decision to stop the sale of diesel cars by 2030, yet, in Britain, I think, it is 2035. Maybe we will see a reverse: this state will be dumping its cars in England and elsewhere, as happened over the past, unless those dates correspond at some stage. I even believe that 2030 is too far away for that action. Unless there are also incentives to help those who have diesel cars — the poor people who are reliant on them — and those who are reliant on inefficient petrol cars, they will not be able to afford the newer models, the newer electric cars, and that is where your problem is. For the foreseeable future, most people will rely on petrol or diesel because they do not have the 40,000 or 50,000 required in this state, anyway, to buy the most efficient electric cars.

Karin Smyth:

Thank you, Laura, for a really interesting talk. First of all, I am really pleased to hear that you and the other environmental agency people meet across the jurisdictions. That is of real interest to us, and maybe we can think about how we are a bit more informed about the work that you do across jurisdictions on the environmental agenda, as we try to do. Second of all, I am a Member of Parliament from Bristol, and we are the home of the first Bio-Bus, which is powered by human sewage and food waste, for those who do not know. This is possible. It is expensive, and there is some degree of controversy, but it is possible.

I have been a vegetarian since 1988, and I have family who are rural farmers in Mayo and Cavan. They nearly ran me out of the house; in fact, they did literally say, “What are you doing sitting in the house, still?”. I became a vegetarian some 30-odd years ago, so it is not new, a lot of this, is it? I have sympathy, obviously, for my own family. The town/city/rural divide is a problem for us in England, but it would be really helpful to have a bit more of a view about that and how you manage that issue around people’s livelihoods and transport, particularly in rural areas, as opposed to, the younger cities, where people feel very different about this. It is a real problem for us as politicians: how we help move forward the agenda with these very real and very different views from our towns and our cities and our rural communities.

Ms Laura Burke:

OK. Starting with Simon with regard to toolkit and, I suppose, learning from each other, I am more than happy to talk to you about the things that we have done. Also, since 2004, we have had what is called a “national waste prevention programme” the EPA were on. Now, it is “waste” in the broadest sense as in “waste of resources”. There are lots of things there that we have done that have worked. Some things have not worked as well, but you have to try things out. We would be more than happy to share. There is a risk that we always bring in the next set of consultants, and, actually, there is a huge amount of learning, probably, in the room. As I said, I am more than happy to share that.

With regard to keeping up that sense of urgency, there is a risk. I suppose, with climate communication, it is something that, it is perceived, will happen a long time in the future to

somebody who is far away, not really directly impacting on me. We have been focusing on, I suppose, the win-wins — for example, things like air quality and identifying that, if you take action, for example, on diesel buses, as we were mentioning, there is a co-benefit there, which is your health now — and, in that way, trying to make some of the climate change debate more real and relevant to people. Again, there is retrofitting houses: “Your home will be warmer, more comfortable now”. That seems to get more resonance with people. There is also, as a group of scientists and engineers, working with researchers on the social science side of things and the behavioural change side and saying, “How do you communicate better?” across all of our aspects, climate being one very important one. It is trying to make it relevant to now.

With regard to your future generations Act, I think it is called, it is something that, I was saying at the break, I thought was really inspiring in Wales, looking at sustainability, looking at how that is embedded in actions across all government Departments. There is a lot of learning there, and it is really an inspirational thing that has been done in Wales. I would certainly love to see us in the Republic of Ireland taking a leaf out of your book on that one.

With regard to planning and charging infrastructure, absolutely, Aengus, that is something that we need to have. If you are to have people buying electric cars, they have to be able to charge their vehicle. My understanding, though, is that there is a new roll-out of charging infrastructure, so I would hope that that issue would be resolved.

The other thing that we need to look at — we focus an awful lot on the private car or public transport — is freight. That is a big issue in, I suppose, all countries, when you look at the amount of goods that are transported around, you see that they tend to be transported in diesel vans etc. What are the opportunities for freight? It does not tend to be electrification; it can be biogas and other things as well. That is something that just gets lost in some of the discussion that we should bring to the fore.

With regard to the stopping of the sale of diesel and dates corresponding, I suppose my focus would be on not having hard dates, because, again, we have seen dates change, dates move. I was quoting to somebody that the first national mitigation plan in Ireland had talked about the closure of Moneypoint. We are a long way down the line, and we are still talking about the closure of Moneypoint coal-fired power plant. I would like to see real dates, rather than a fight in about five years here or there, with regard to different dates between us and the UK.

On the rural/urban divide, I think there will be different solutions in the rural situation and the urban situation: for example, public transport will not necessarily be the same in a rural setting. You need to look at how, in the urban setting, there are lots of co-wins. There is the air quality issue with regard to going to electric; there is the congestion issue with going to increased public transport. In rural settings, we may be looking at different models, including incentivising the electric car, because people will still need to find different ways of transporting longer distances.

In the EPA, one of the things that we have been funding — we have a research fund — is looking at a review of climate policy over the years. Transport is one of those areas. We are looking at other countries that may be perceived as poorer, such as India, and how they look at public transport, public taxis. There are different models there that can be used. We have to recognise the situation in which people live. A rural environment is different.

It is back to the dialogue, having discussions: what are the opportunities? I will hurry up, because I know you have other questions. I moved from Dublin into the countryside. There are lots of benefits to living in the countryside for staff that we employ in the EPA in rural

areas in Monaghan, Castlebar and places like that. Quality of life issues can be a real selling point for employment in those areas. Things are different for different people; we are not all the same. What I value may be different to what you value, with regard to work-life balance etc.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

The lights went off in the back yard. It was obviously a climate measure being taken by someone.

Deputy Joan Burton:

Is there joined-up thinking across the agencies in Ireland? In preserving habitat and biodiversity, we have one set of messages, but, in fact, in farming policies and practice, we see a significant destruction of hedgerows. We had reference earlier to the benefit of planting trees, but a lot of people in farming are caught between a rock and a hard place. In order to generate income, they will need to farm in an industrial and efficient way, but, if we are going to save the planet, we need to preserve habitats, hedgerows and biodiversity. We have had some unfortunate forest fires through the burning of gorse, which we have seen particularly over the Easter period.

I am interested in whether you meet your counterparts in other agencies so that we develop some point of consistency. Farmers need to be paid more to conserve biodiversity and to look after the environment, as it were. That is a clear and important objective in terms of decarbonising the economy and preserving what we have. What is your approach to having a joined-up system in relation to rural Ireland?

12.15 pm

Vicky Ford:

Thank you. I have been one of the MPs who have supported a private Member's action to put the net-zero carbon target into UK law by 2050, which is what our Committee on Climate Change has recommended we should do. We are also doing a very detailed report through the Science and Technology Select Committee in the Westminster Parliament on using the technology to do that. So, I guess, I have a few questions. Are you looking at putting net-zero into Irish law as well by that 2050 target or around then? If you were to hit your renewables 70% by 2030, do you need more interconnectors between the UK and Ireland by that date? And what are the plans to deliver them, because it is really important for the resilience of the grid?

Also, next year, Britain is trying to lead the next global climate change conference in London. How important do you think it is that that is led in a sort of Western European country that we as a developed country — you know, are you sponsoring that as well? And then just — sorry, a quick final one — on shipping emissions, as island nations, we need to lead that shipping emissions reduction. What are your thoughts on that?

John Scott:

Thank you, Co-Chair. Could I just talk a little bit about the transition and the requirement for a different type of transition for rural areas — different from urban — because in rural areas particularly, we often have more elderly, retired people? Our speaker spoke about the benefits of moving to the countryside, but some people's benefits of moving to the countryside are other people's problems. For example, their isolation. There is often poorer housing. It is harder to get tradesmen to retrofit, and there is often poorer transport. Pauline McNeill, my

colleague, thinks it is hard to get a bus in the centre of Glasgow. Trust me, it is a lot harder to get a bus in rural Ayrshire where I am from. It is more likely that there will be fewer charging points. The low-hanging fruit — where the charging points are going to be fitted across these islands — will be in the most obvious and high-use areas. So, the rural areas will suffer again, and they must not be left behind. That takes me to looking at the future and the possibility of hydrogen vehicles. That is already an option in public transport elsewhere in the world and Europe, and I think it may move into individual vehicles as a potential, if batteries cannot be charged easily or recharged easily. Thank you.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

OK. I have two more questioners: Catherine Noone and Peter Fitzpatrick.

Senator Catherine Noone:

Thank you for your presentation. I have two quick questions. I already put this one to the Minister earlier on with regard to supermarkets and the suppliers of supermarkets and what kinds of interactions internationally you have had with counterparts. Is there any hope of making some inroads? Whatever about the recyclability of plastic, the overuse of it is a big problem, and I would just be interested in any comments that you might have in addition to what the Minister had to say.

Then, in terms of innovation in the public transport space, for example, take scooters. You know the new scooters that are being used by people to get around? I personally think they should be embraced as way of getting around once it is safe and once they are limited to a certain speed, because it is possible technologically to do that. In Ireland, I don't know, are we sticking our heads in the sand about this issue or being dinosaurs? You know, the guards are currently seizing them because apparently they come under the heading of an MPV and, therefore, should not be on the roads. That is the type of area that we clearly need to be innovative in rather than actually preventing it. There is clear international evidence of them working very effectively in other cities, and I know it is probably a matter more for the RSA and the NTA than your own agency, but I just wondered did you have any comments on that type of innovation and really embracing that type of activity so that we have fewer people in cars? Thank you.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

You are last. Did I miss anyone else? No? Grand.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick:

First of all, Laura, thank you very much for your presentation. Pollution is a very serious situation at the moment. In Ireland, 1,200 people die due to air pollution which mainly arises from domestic solid fuel burning. In your Department, the Environmental Protection Agency's air quality index for health is very important, and an awful lot of people do not understand what it is. It tells you the current air quality in your region and whether or not this might affect you or your child's health. A lot of people suffer from heart and lung conditions such as asthma, and we have doctors and experts in this country advising people to go out and exercise, and how do people actually find out what the pollution is in their area?

As a TD, a lot of people come into me, and when I see people who are overweight or who feel ill, the first thing I do is encourage them to go out and exercise. I do a lot of exercise myself. Recently, I have noticed people burning fuel. I am lucky in that, when I go for a run, I keep away from the motorways. I try to go into fields and areas that I know should be good

for me, but I notice lately, especially in my hometown of Dundalk, the smell and atmosphere of the air is a concern to me. How do I find out about the air pollution in my area? Thank you.

Ms Laura Burke:

I will start at the end and go up if that is OK.

The link between air pollution and climate change is there. With regard to air pollution, on the EPA website, you can go in and find out about air quality and there is an air quality index for health. At the moment, our work is at quite a high level, and, for the last number of years, we would have been focusing — with all of our air quality monitoring — on compliance with EU requirements, but recently what we have got both money and resources from the Department for is to double the amount of air quality monitors that we have and also, then, to have air quality modelling in place. So, a lot more sophisticated than would have been, and this is actually similar and we have learnt from other countries across the EU.

At the moment, there is information on the EPA website, but we have already increased the number of online air quality monitors so you can go online and see the air quality in your area, but we are also developing that even further. In the next six months to a year, you will have a lot more information about not only national air quality but local air quality in your area. We have identified, based on the science, the suitable locations for all of those monitors. Then, also, working with the likes of local authorities to install even more monitors and making those available.

For example, we have rolled out air quality monitors in the likes of Enniscorthy, which has an issue as there is not a smoky fuel ban or smoky coal ban there, and there is impact on air quality and we are seeing it. In other towns, particularly, where there is not a smoky fuel ban, we are seeing an impact on air quality. In cities, the impact is more around transport; in rural towns, it is about burning of materials. I know we have effectively taken a step backwards in not having the roll-out of the smoky fuel ban or smoky coal ban across the whole of the country, but I hope that more work can happen in that space.

We are being a lot more proactive in our role around making information available, and we have the funding to do so, which is even more important.

Catherine, you had mentioned supermarkets. In the food waste area — and this goes back to the national waste prevention programme that I mentioned — we have been working with supermarkets over the last, probably two to three years. To be honest with you, it is a tough enough area to break into, but we had five of the six major retailers now working with us on food waste, food waste measurement and food waste reduction. I am hoping that that's an "in", then, in order to do further work with them on the likes of plastics etc.

There is only one of the retailers who has not signed up to it. So, we have got the big players. What they are seeing is that there is a consumer demand. So you are hearing more and more that they are doing it not necessarily for the good of the environment but they see that there is a demand out there, and so there is a competitive advantage to do so. And they also like being seen to work with the EPA, and we are taking advantage of that as well.

With regard to innovation and things like, you know, the scooters, we need to find ways to adapt. This actually links to all — we make policies at a particular point in time. I am actually thinking of the likes of peat and for other things. They may have been a good policy at a point in time in the state, but we need then to realise when it is time to change that policy or to adapt. I think we need to be better at changing these things faster. I would use the example of

the public bike scheme. That was a huge success. Banning smoking in workplaces: huge opposition, actually, and a really big success. The plastic bags: big success. When we do it, it works, but we just need to find ways of doing it faster, so I am in support of you on that.

On the just transition and the risks of being in isolation in rural areas, absolutely. I can see it, as I said, living in a rural area myself, and the risk of isolation. On the flip side of that, though, you can be living in the centre of a city and be at risk of isolation as well. So that is why I think it needs to be different solutions in different areas, and that is why I keep coming back to the dialogue. We need to be talking to people about what works for them, because if we are sitting in ivory towers in the EPA or in the Dáil or wherever, we are not necessarily as connected with people and what really impacts them as we should be. That is why I said, for us, it has been huge learning actually sitting down and the dialogue, and I would really want to develop that further so that the actions we take are relevant and we do not have — I suppose it links to Joan's point — unintended consequences of a policy at a particular time that is done in good faith but then has an impact.

I will just maybe skip on to Joan, then, just with regard to joined-up thinking across agencies. So much of our time in the Environmental Protection Agency is spent working with a variety of bodies and a variety of Departments. Every day of the week, we have staff in, whether it is the Department of Transport, Department of Agriculture, the National Parks and Wildlife Service etc. It is literally on a daily basis, and it does remind me that a previous well-gone-now Secretary General of the Department of Environment, when talking about getting environmental messages out to other Departments, referred to 'infiltrating' other Departments. I suppose I probably took that a bit too seriously, and we are in all of those places.

We also now have something that we did not have a number of years ago, which is strategic environment assessment. The EPA is a competent authority for plans and programmes that we would not necessarily otherwise have an opportunity to feed into. That is everything from county development plans to transport plans, wind energy plans etc. It is where we do not necessarily have a regulatory rule, but we can actually input into. So the likes of the common agricultural policy and its implementation in Ireland: we have an opportunity to engage in that.

So we take those very seriously and engage with all of the Departments and make comments such as the unintended consequences of some policies and the need to incentivise, for example, the agriculture sector. There are good examples of that. The BurrenLIFE project is a really good example that could be rolled out.

Lastly, with regard to Vicky Ford MP, with regard to net-zero into Irish law, there is discussion on these things and the joint Oireachtas Committee has made a number of recommendations. The Minister is talking about targets for each sector. You are ahead of us in the UK, I think, with regard to that. That is something that I would not prefer to see, but I think that is a really good focus for us. I prefer not to be arguing about whether it is zero or not. If we can get it into sectoral targets, so that each sector has an obligation, rather than everybody saying, "Well, somebody somewhere should do it, and it is not us", I think the sectoral targets should be the focus in the short term. That is, I suppose, a personal view.

With regard to energy and interconnectors, absolutely. If we are to do this, we need interconnection, not only with the UK, but we are also looking with mainland Europe. I suppose, to be blunt about it in the context of Brexit, that is really important as well with regard to how the connection of energy systems works.

The last two things with regard to the global climate conference: absolutely, I think, again from the discussion this morning, we in Western Europe need to be seen to be taking action and showing leadership in this space. So, I think it is great that the global conference that you are talking about is a really, really good initiative. With regard to shipping emissions: absolutely, it is a no-brainer. We are starting to hit aviation emissions. Again, there is a lot of resistance to that, but we need to tackle all the sources of emissions. There can be no sacred cows. I will leave it at that.

12.30 pm

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Go raibh maith agat. On behalf of the Assembly, I really thank you for your insightful, in-depth and informative contribution here this morning. *[Applause.]*

PROMOTING BRITISH-IRISH DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

OK. Assembly, as you all know, we are running rather late today, so there will be a slight rescheduling of some of the Committee reports and the annual report till another point over the next day or so.

We will now move on to our final session before lunch. I am very pleased to welcome His Excellency Ambassador Robin Barnett, UK ambassador to Ireland, here with us today, a regular contributor and friend to BIPA. Robin, it is a pleasure to welcome you back again to our Assembly, and we very much look forward to hearing you share your view on UK-Ireland diplomatic relations. Ladies and gentlemen, the ambassador. *[Applause.]*

His Excellency Robin Barnett (Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Ireland):

Co-Chairs, distinguished parliamentarians, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for inviting me back once again to address you today. As always, it is both a great honour and, genuinely, a great pleasure, and I am particularly delighted to join you in beautiful County Wicklow. I pay tribute to BIPA Co-Chair, Deputy Seán Crowe, and his colleagues, who have organised this meeting, in particular to Dervila Flynn and Veronica Carr, without whose work behind the scenes, I think we would all agree, these meetings would simply not be the same.

When we gathered in London at the end of October last year, it looked likely that it would be the last plenary meeting before the UK left the European Union. That, of course, is not how things have turned out, and events over recent months have resulted in an agreement with the EU on an extension until 31 October at the latest, crucially with the option to leave earlier as soon as a deal has been ratified. As our Prime Minister has said on many occasions, we believe that the best approach is to leave the EU in a smooth and orderly way with the deal that has been reached. It is now incumbent, clearly, on the UK to press on with those efforts to reach a consensus on a deal that is in the national interest. That would enable us to move on to developing the close future partnership between the UK and the EU that, I hope, everyone in this room would wish to see and that can guarantee no hard borders on the island of Ireland or between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK.

Since the anniversary of the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement 21 years ago, Northern Ireland has been transformed in so many ways. We believe it is vital that the peace, hope and prosperity that it brought are preserved, and so, though it has been said many times before, let me restate unequivocally to you here that, whatever the shape of the UK's exit

from the European Union, we will make sure that we protect the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement in all its parts under all circumstances.

Events in Derry/Londonderry over Easter horrified us all and show that there are still those who continue to attack the peace that is so precious to us all and can cause chaos in local communities. The response of the people of Creggan and across these islands has been absolute. One could not help but be moved by the powerful words of Father Martin Magill at the funeral of Lyra McKee and the response of the congregation. He hoped that, if some sliver of hope could be taken from the senseless, despicable murder of a young woman, it was that her death would be the doorway to a new beginning in Northern Ireland and that it would mark the end of violence there. It is therefore extremely welcome that all-party talks have restarted. It is vital to the peace and prosperity of Northern Ireland that the devolved institutions are restored, and the UK and Ireland are both absolutely committed to this process and to working together with all the parties to find a way for this to happen as soon as possible. That is what the people of Northern Ireland need.

Though Brexit has undoubtedly occupied much of the bandwidth since I last addressed you, I am pleased to report that our ambition to maintain and improve the bilateral relationship remains absolutely undimmed. Officials in London and in Dublin and our respective embassies have continued to work closely together on a wide range of issues, all designed to underpin our special and unique relationship. You will have seen that, just last week, there was a British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference in London, following November's meeting in Dublin. At the most recent meeting, there was broad agreement on an outline structure to underpin the future of our bilateral relationship post Brexit. I was pleased, too, that, at that meeting, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, David Lidington, and the Tánaiste, Simon Coveney, were able to sign a memorandum of understanding on the common travel area. I referred to our unique relationship earlier, and there is surely no better demonstration of that than the CTA, which grants our citizens many rights and privileges in each other's respective countries, meaning that they can travel, live and work wherever in the UK or Ireland they choose and access education, healthcare and social services whatever the circumstances of our departure from the EU. It took some work to get there, so it was good to be able to offer this wholehearted reassurance to Irish citizens in the UK and to British citizens here in Ireland.

To see the importance of the links that the CTA helps to foster one need only look back to the visit of President Higgins to the UK in February, where we were pleased to welcome him to Birmingham and Liverpool, two cities shaped and influenced over the years by their links to the Irish diaspora. The visit, for which the president was joined, in part, by HRH the Prince of Wales, was the latest landmark in the ongoing work in which the president and His Royal Highness have each sought to promote a vision of constructive relationships between our two islands that help to preserve the unique character and richness of our interdependence — something, I know, that will continue in future visits to each other's countries.

Continuing the theme of looking beyond capitals, in Ireland, our embassy has continued to seek opportunities outside of Dublin. Following the successful launch of the UK/south-west Ireland prosperity report in November 2018, we have now begun implementing the recommendations, including the creation of a broad stakeholder steering group. Our so-called "Joining the Dots" project is the next stage in bringing UK/south-west Ireland industry collaboration, including in areas like fintech, cyber, smart cities and science, to a new level. The focus in Ireland will grow from Cork up to Limerick and will involve the sharing of expertise and best practice. Thematic visits to the UK by Irish delegations and reciprocal visits to south-west Ireland to achieve these partnerships will aim to develop profitable and

sustainable business between companies. This ambitious programme was launched with the support of the Tánaiste last November and fits into the UK and, indeed, Ireland's industrial strategy of increasing economic development outside our capital cities.

For those of you who do not hail from the south-west of Ireland, let me reassure you that we are focused on many other opportunities, whether it be in the regions around Galway, here in the sunny south-east, which it genuinely is today, but also — importantly, I think — in the north-west of Ireland. In that respect I would just draw your attention to the recent announcement of a city deal for Derry/Londonderry. This was discussed at the BIIGC last week, and the Irish Government were clear that they were very supportive in playing their full part in promoting the development of that region.

As an alumnus of Birmingham University, I was delighted to be present, too, at the signing of an academic cooperation agreement between my old university and Trinity College Dublin. This offers further reassurance that the strong tradition of academic collaboration between us will continue post Brexit.

Let me now turn to the decade of commemorations. Nothing has exemplified the transformation of relations between our two countries better than the dignified, inclusive and, frequently, so very moving way in which the first half of the decade was handled. This has helped us begin to address some of the issues around our shared history, although there is much more to do, as my Prime Minister noted in a speech in Belfast in February, when she suggested that we should bring young people from both islands together to discuss this and other issues. All of this, I think, bodes well as we enter the next and, perhaps, more difficult phase of commemorations. For our part, we look forward to continuing the excellent and very close collaboration we have had with the Irish Government and other stakeholders around the centenaries.

Though I recognise that the demands on parliamentarians' time have been intense in recent months, as many in this audience know very well indeed, our embassy has facilitated a range of parliament-to-parliament activity, including a memorable visit by the Lords and Commons rugby team, who did their bit for UK-Ireland relations by finishing a creditable second in their fixture with the Oireachtas XV. I look forward to welcoming them back to Dublin in 2021. On a purely personal note, may I say what a pleasure it was to finally witness an English rugby team of any sort beat an Irish one when I was at the Aviva Stadium in February? Better late than never.

I would now like to turn to the key focus of this plenary, a crucially important topic which we have already heard a good deal about this morning. It is very hard for me to follow Minister Richard Bruton and Laura Burke, but let me essay a few thoughts. There can, surely, be few more appropriate settings to be discussing this globally shared challenge than in the garden of Ireland. Most of our warmest years on record have been since 1990; indeed, one need only look to last year to see the impact of extreme weather, whether hot or cold. In the future, we may see more intense weather events wreak havoc on our communities and our economies. While we can recover from floods and storm damage, though issues like insurance are, indeed, complex, the likelihood of rising sea levels poses an even more profound threat to our isles and to many other people living on our shared planet.

The good news, as we have already heard, is that we can do something about it. The recent protests by schoolchildren across Ireland and the UK and further afield show just how much this issue matters to the next generation. It shows they are prepared to do something about it and that they want us to take the lead.

I am pleased to say that the UK has done something about it. Over the last 30 years, our economy has grown by over 70%, while, at the same time, we have reduced our emissions by 40% — more than any other G7 country on a per person basis. In 2008, we were the first country to introduce legally binding long-term emissions targets. Today, we are a hub for green finance and have over 400,000 jobs in low-carbon businesses. Just last week, our national grid was able to provide power without using coal for over a week — the longest period since the industrial revolution.

12.45 pm

All of that reinforces the message you have already heard that climate change is not just a threat but can also be an opportunity. That is the reason that the UK wants to be even more ambitious. By 2030, we want to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by 57%, compared with the 1990 baseline, and we are legally bound to that target through our own Climate Change Act, even though we will be leaving the European Union.

Within the EU and at a global level, we will continue to show leadership on climate change. We want to share our experience and expertise to help provide food security, water security and job security in developing countries. Between 2016 and 2020, we will have committed nearly £6 billion to help developing countries reduce emissions and develop their climate resilience. We have been particularly active in Africa, where I can see very real opportunities to work much more closely with Ireland, building on the priorities set out in Ireland's new international development policy, particularly as Ireland expands its diplomatic and development presence on the continent. We also, as you know, are bidding to host the COP26 in the UK. In response to some of the issues already raised here today, I think that we need to continue to work very closely through international bodies, because this is a global problem that requires not only national but global solutions.

Returning closer to home, I also see clear opportunities for us to work together on solving some of our shared challenges. Science, innovation, research — areas where the UK and Ireland already enjoy excellent relationships and where we are committed to doing even more together — will help unlock the answer to reducing emissions from our buildings, farms and transport systems. It was John Tyndall, an Irish scientist from Carlow, who first proved the existence of a greenhouse effect and who is now celebrated as one of the pioneers of climate science. Later in his career, John based himself in the UK and was rightly evangelical about teaching science to as broad an audience as possible and inspiring the next generation of scientists. Today, the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research at the University of East Anglia bears his name and continues that legacy, conducting research into critical issues like how we can rapidly reduce car emissions and the most successful way to introduce electric vehicles. In terms of cross-border cooperation, the University of Strathclyde is working with partners in Ireland and Northern Ireland on a renewable energy project that aims to produce 60 years' worth of research in renewable energy at PhD level and above. Those are the sorts of things that really can make a difference.

Ladies and gentlemen, we cannot leave it all to scientists, academics or others: we also need to take personal responsibility for our actions. At the embassy, we are trying to do our modest bit. Since setting up a plastics committee, we have reduced our use of single-use plastics by over 40% in the last 6 months and are on track to completely eradicate their use by the end of the year. I know that, under Minister Bruton's leadership, the Irish public sector is committed to doing the same. While this may sound like a drop in the ocean, I think we in this room all know that changing our own behaviours and the way we think about climate issues at every level of society is crucial to making a difference. Let us not pretend that the scale of change

required will be easy, but what we need to achieve is achievable, and the UK is committed to playing its full part.

In closing, I stress the importance we attach to gatherings of parliamentarians such as this, particularly in this centenary year of the first sitting of the Dáil. As we look for ways to maintain and strengthen the habit of cooperation that has developed between our two countries in recent years, strong parliamentary links will be absolutely essential. I wish you all a very successful meeting. Thank you very much.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

A number of Members of the Assembly would like to make comments, and, if you would stay for a few questions, we would be most grateful.

Senator Frank Feighan:

Thank you, Ambassador. It is very timely that we are talking about promoting British-Irish diplomatic relations and strong parliamentary party links. To me, the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly has been unique. It has done extremely good work. When I think of our history, I look back at a few dates: in 2011, we had the visit of the Queen to the Republic, and, in 2014, as you rightly said, we had the visit of President Higgins to the United Kingdom. I think it is a relationship that we took for granted. The British-Irish Chamber of Commerce was set up in 2011, despite centuries of trade, hundreds of thousands of Irish men and women working in the UK. We have had the German-Irish Chamber of Industry and Commerce maybe for thirty years. It is a relationship that we took for granted, and, as you rightly said, since the Good Friday Agreement, we need to do more.

One aspect that has happened here is, in 2013, we had a referendum on the future of Seanad Éireann, and the people chose to keep the Seanad. When the Seanad was first set up, 30% of members of Seanad Éireann were from an Ulster unionist background. Last year, we had Ian Marshall elected — the first Ulster unionist elected to the Seanad in decades. We have had some great Members of the Irish Seanad: John Robb, Seamus Mallon, Gordon Wilson, the two McAleeses, Maurice Hayes, and we have Niall Ó Donnghaile there as well. What I am trying to say is that, if we really want to fill that gap in British-Irish relationships, we have to look at filling the political gap as well. I think there is a case for a Seanad or a senate in Scotland, a case for a senate in Wales, a case for a Seanad or a citizens' forum in Northern Ireland, because it brings politicians together. We have Billy Lawless from the Irish diaspora representing the United States. I have no doubt that there will be a senator representing the diaspora from the United Kingdom.

I just feel that we need to do more on a political level. In a few hours' time, we have the new common charter, which is effectively talking about initiatives to empower civic society to drive cross-border and north/south and east/west cooperation on these islands. I really think we need to do an awful lot more politically. On average, there were 26 meetings daily in the EU between British and Irish officials, and, when that goes and when you leave the EU, we have to fill that vacuum. Thanks for your indulgence, Co-chair, but I really think that we need to do a lot more politically across all the parliaments and devolved Governments between Ireland and the UK.

His Excellency Robin Barnett:

I think — I hope, at least — that I made it clear in my speech how important, I think, we all see the strengthening of parliamentary links at every level. For our part at the embassy, we will continue to facilitate contacts. I am keen to ensure, for example, that, as we work on our

programme to bring the regions of the two islands together, elected, local politicians play an important part in that process. That is certainly what we have done with the “Joining the Dots” initiative. The broader the range of stakeholders that are engaged in this kind of work the better.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:

Ambassador, thank you again for another thoughtful and considered contribution at one of our plenaries. You are very welcome.

One of the first things you said in your contribution was that it was your Government’s commitment to protect the Good Friday Agreement in all of its parts under all circumstances. That is certainly a very heartening aspiration, but the difficulty in political reality is that, whether in the context of Brexit or no Brexit, there is an abject failure to protect and, indeed, implement the Good Friday Agreement in all of its parts and under all circumstances, and that is central to the political discourse in the North that has led to the talks that you referenced in your speech.

One of the specific points I want to home in on, particularly for colleagues from other Assemblies’ attention, relates to a number of live cases in the courts in Belfast at the minute. Under the Good Friday Agreement, we know, people have the right to be identified and, crucially, accepted as British, as Irish or as both. We have examples now in the North where people who are trying through the courts, in immigration cases for spouses or partners, to assert their Irish citizenship are having to renounce British citizenship. Essentially, as Caroline Nokes said, I think in quite flagrant disregard for the Good Friday Agreement, as a matter of law everyone born in the North is British. Obviously, that runs in direct contravention of the spirit, the word and the letter of the Good Friday Agreement.

Theresa May, in the speech in February that you referenced, Ambassador, announced a review of citizenship matters, but it transpires that the review, through parliamentary questions and FOIs from the media, has no terms of reference, has no timelines and has no one attached to carry it out. There is a real concern out there. Professor Colin Harvey, the former head of the School of Law at Queen’s University, presented to the Seanad’s Brexit Committee last week, and he suggested that Brexit was exacerbating a human rights crisis in the North.

Obviously, in order for us to protect the Good Friday Agreement in all of its parts under all circumstances, we have to ensure its fullest implementation. That includes a bill of rights, which remains unfulfilled; it includes an all-Ireland charter of rights, which is unfulfilled; and it includes, I think, crucially, in the context of what you mentioned — the awful events in Derry — the sitting of the Civic Forum, which has a key role to play in assisting the political and rights deficit that is apparent at the moment.

It is really, Ambassador, to use the opportunity to say that those are the political realities that are being faced, and, if we are true to the Good Friday Agreement, all of us have a responsibility to ensure that it is implemented fully and not to take our eye off the ball, particularly when it comes to such important, fundamental aspects of it.

His Excellency Robin Barnett:

The review that the Prime Minister announced in February is happening and is ongoing. With respect to the broader set of issues, we are in the opening phase of talks to restore devolution in Northern Ireland, and all of these issues will, clearly, be part of those discussions, so you would not expect me, this morning, to prejudge that.

Delyth Jewell AM:

Ambassador, at this time of fractious political realities with Brexit, how do you think we can ensure that young people in Ireland and in all nations of the UK can continue to have a dialogue and to share cultural connections?

1.00 pm

His Excellency Robin Barnett:

This is very much one of the themes of our embassy's activity for 2019 but not just, I think, a theme of our embassy; it is a theme shared by many people who work in the field of bringing young people together. I have already referred to the Prime Minister's speech in Belfast. We, as an embassy, want to bring more young people together to hear their views on everything from history and climate change to their aspirations for the future. We will continue to discuss with the Irish Government broader ways in which we can work together to bring people from across both our islands together to talk about these issues, and one body that is definitely very interested to engage in this is the Youth Council right here in Ireland. Just to be clear as well, in this effort, we are bringing in our friends and partners in the Scottish and Welsh Governments, both of whom have a hub located in our embassy in Dublin, so we really want to maximise our outreach in this area.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson:

Thank you, Ambassador, for all the work that you are doing to promote good relations at a challenging time.

Legacy, as you know, is an important part of dealing with and resolving the outstanding issues, an important part of the agreement, originally, but, perhaps, one where there was a deficit in that we did not actually, in 1998, agree how we would take forward and deal with the legacy of our troubled past. One element of that is the Smithwick inquiry in the Irish Republic, which inquired into the deaths of the two most senior police officers from Northern Ireland murdered by the IRA during the Troubles. That inquiry made a number of key recommendations. We have had no update from the Irish Government as to what they have done with those recommendations. Are you aware of any progress that has been made in following up on the findings of the Smithwick inquiry in Dublin?

Secondly, on the issue of citizenship, my colleague William Hay, who is the former Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly and is now a member of the House of Lords, was born in Donegal and carries an Irish passport. If he wants to carry a British passport, under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, he has to renounce his Irish citizenship in order to qualify for a British passport. Has not the time come for a bit of reciprocity here? When people talk about problems with British citizenship, we would like to hear them use their influence in the Oireachtas to talk about the other side of the problem. People who were born in the Republic of Ireland but have lived all their life, virtually, in Northern Ireland should not have to renounce their Irish citizenship to become British citizens? Could we, perhaps, see some legislative action in the Oireachtas to deal with that rights issue? Perhaps, that is something, Ambassador, you might make representations on in the course of your work, to encourage the Oireachtas to deal with that vexed issue.

Mr Paul Givan:

Thank you, Ambassador, for your presentation. You rightly highlight the importance of east-west relationships and the need for that continued positive engagement on the Anglo-Irish

dimension. Could I also indicate, Mr Ambassador, the vital role that North/South relations need to play on this island and the damage that has been done over the past number of years because of the way in which the Government of the Irish Republic have engaged on the Brexit issue? It is vital that those relationships are worked at and that we try to improve the relationships. We look back at the halcyon days, when Dr Paisley and Bertie Ahern engaged at the Boyne with such warmth. I look back at the time of the previous Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, and the way he engaged with unionism. Sadly, I look, at the moment, at the way in which the leadership of the Irish Government engages with the unionist people of Northern Ireland, and it is not in keeping with what went before. So, Mr Ambassador, if you, in your role here in the Irish Republic, can make representation to the Irish Government that there is a need to recognise the damage that has been done over the past two years and try to improve that, we, at a political level, for our part, will seek to improve those relationships, and we will engage positively to do that.

Just to pick up a point that Sinn Féin — Niall — made earlier in terms of his commentary about the importance of rights and the Good Friday Agreement, can I just say that, again, on our part, we agree that it is vital that the institutions that were set up under the Good Friday Agreement are, indeed, respected? Those institutions are fundamentally important, and so, whilst everybody needs to acknowledge their responsibilities to protect, in all its parts, the Good Friday Agreement, there is a gaping hole in one of those. As recently as last week, Professor Brice Dickson, the first Chief Commissioner appointed to the Human Rights Commission, made it clear that the right to a Government is the most important right that is currently being denied to the people of Northern Ireland, which continues to undermine the Good Friday Agreement that many in this room hold dear to. Obviously, I campaigned against it — I just make that point — nevertheless, it is there, and so, Mr Ambassador, again I make the point that we want the institutions up and running. We have made that offer to have them up and running today, tomorrow, and there are others who continue to block that. All of us in this room should recognise our responsibilities in that regard.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

We have one final speaker before the Ambassador closes his remarks.

Lord Kilclooney:

Ambassador, a very brief question: for 20 years I represented a United Kingdom constituency — Strangford — with a very large fishing interest, and for decades, Southern Irish fishermen fished in Northern Ireland waters and Northern Ireland fishermen fished freely in Southern Irish waters. However, that cooperation broke down some months ago, when the Southern Irish authorities seized two of our County Down fishing boats — this at a time when we're supposed to be cooperating on this island. We then had an assurance from the Irish Prime Minister, Mr Varadkar, that he would address the problem as a matter of urgency. Can we report progress back in County Down?

His Excellency Robin Barnett:

I shall start with the last question, because the answer to that is, “Yes, we can”. I am delighted to report that the Oireachtas passed legislation on that issue that was signed by President Higgins. There may be somebody here who can remember the date; I cannot quite.

Lord Kilclooney:

Well that is excellent. That is very good. It was unfortunate that it was necessary to do it, but it has been done, and that is good.

His Excellency Robin Barnett:

Other points were raised by previous speakers. Let me assure you that we have a very wide-ranging and productive dialogue between the British Government and the Irish authorities on all the issues that have been raised, both around relationships North and South, as well as east and west; that we are all committed to working together to resolve the many challenging issues that continue to exist; and that our conversations are often frank but are, invariably, constructive. We are trying to deliver solutions to what, I think, everybody here in the room would accept are complex problems. I can promise you that my team at the British embassy in Dublin and I are working on these issues with real commitment and intensity.

Thank you very much. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much, Ambassador.

We must move swiftly on. Some of the other items will now be delayed, including the annual report and the Committee reports, I think, till tomorrow morning, Co-Chair. We will now adjourn for lunch, but, before you rush off for lunch, please could you all gather on the steps — not the veranda; the steps — outside the restaurant? In fact, it is just out here, is it? Just out here — the steps just outside here for the official photograph, after which you are invited to join everyone for lunch.

The sitting was suspended at 1.09 pm.

The sitting was resumed at 2.56 pm.

MARINE ENVIRONMENT REPORT

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I welcome you all back. Can people please turn off their mobile phones? As you know, it can be distracting if they go off while people are speaking.

I am pleased to welcome Professor Melanie Austen and Dr Stephen Hynes to jointly address the Assembly. Their reports are available outside. People can collect them after the session or, if they want, do it now. The reports call for:

“a better incorporation of the values stemming from marine ecosystem services and natural capital in marine management and policy decisions. Evaluating the impacts of human activity on ecosystem services and their social and economic consequences can highlight the trade-offs between actions to reverse the declining states of marine biodiversity and ecosystems, and possible competing economic interests.”

I am very pleased to welcome you both.

Professor Melanie Austen (Plymouth Marine Laboratory):

Thank you very much, Mr Co-Chair. It is really nice to be here. Thank you for the invitation.

We were asked to come and talk specifically to this one, I think — ‘Valuing Marine Ecosystems’ — but you get two for the price of one here. This one is a kind of an overview, and that one is a bit more of deep dive into the Irish blue economy and blue ecosystem services. We have divided the presentation into a double act between me and Stephen Hynes, who is going to be talking about the detail of the Irish report. I will talk about the overview.

This is a European Marine Board briefing. It is supposed to be a policy brief around valuing marine ecosystems. It was a part of a working group on valuing marine ecosystems. I was

lucky enough to chair it, and we have quite a lot of people behind it here. Perhaps most importantly, we have a group of academics, most of whom work to some extent or other with policymakers, either in their own country nationally or in Europe. I have highlighted, obviously, my name from the UK, and Stephen was also a co-author on this, so quite a broad representation from across Europe collaborating on the document.

I come from the UK, so I have to give the blurb that I come from Plymouth Marine Laboratory, which is an independent provider of policy-relevant marine research. We are also a UK Research and Innovation collaborative centre. We have about 160 staff and a lot of postgraduate students — about 50 postgrad students. Turnover is around £11 million, so, for our local economy, we are quite important in the south-west. Plymouth is a real centre for marine research. We do that largely in partnership, and we are quite good at collaborating in partnerships. We have partnerships with over 60 countries and over 500 organisations, because, to be honest, you cannot deliver marine research without having partnerships, really.

What are the areas that we are researching and why are we doing this valuing of marine ecosystems? We know that marine systems are under a lot of pressure. You have heard a little about climate change and discussed that this morning and other environmental changes as well that can bring results like outbreaks and invasive species. Jellyfish are real problem in the southern Mediterranean. There are transport problems. There is a burgeoning of energy devices out there, aquaculture, tourism, leisure, and, obviously, the inevitable problem of how we go about exploiting our resources sustainably through fishing etc. So there are a lot of issues, and we do not always deal with those.

We have started using these frameworks, and this is an example of one, which, I am guessing, you probably can't see very well, which is linking, "What are the services we get from the marine environment?". We have this natural capital, which is biodiversity and natural resources, which provides marine ecosystem services. The processes, the functions, the biodiversity — all of the things in the marine environment that actually, directly or indirectly, contribute to societal welfare, to our health and to economic activities. There is a supply of ecosystem services from the marine environment on the one side and a demand from them on the other side. The valuation that we do is from the demand perspective, but we have to maintain the natural capital, if we can keep that sustainable.

3.00 pm

The language used to be around "ecosystem services". I am originally a marine ecologist who always struggled to answer the "So what?" question: "Who cares about the little worms that I look at?". I started to realise I needed to think about it from people's perspective. I would argue that "natural capital" is a terminology that actually starts to put me into the bankers' and the accountants' perspectives, much more than the perspective that I used to be more comfortable with. We now call it "natural capital" instead of "biodiversity", and it is, basically, our environmental assets: the ocean, the land, the freshwater and the different species that they contain. From my perspective as a marine scientist, it is also the processes and functions that they do that are really important: maintaining all that biodiversity; maintaining the nutrient cycle; maintaining the gas and climate proportions in our air. That is part of the ecosystem. The components of the natural environment that are directly useful to us are the ecosystem services, and we have flows of those ecosystem services that come from our assets. As I sometimes put it, it is almost like the assets are what we have in the bank, and we have to make sure that we do not take too much of the flows or the interest before we start moving into depreciating our capital.

The ecosystem services are grouped into three categories. The obvious ones that everybody remembers are the provisioning ones, particularly food, fish, fisheries, the stuff we eat but also the raw materials like aggregates. Then, there are the regulating services. At least half of our CO₂ is absorbed by the seas. The seas are incredibly important for the control of CO₂ and, hence, climate regulation. There is a big role for the seas in flood protection and waste removal. Ultimately, whatever we chuck into the atmosphere, the seas or the rivers usually ends up the sea somewhere and is dealt with there. We tend to ignore the cultural services as not being important, but, actually, if you think about most people's interaction with the sea, there is a huge amount of leisure, recreation, inspiration and heritage, and all of that has an importance to people.

When we start looking at the importance to people, we can see that these two aspects — the capital and the services — are provided by the natural environment, but the goods and benefits, the bits where people start to value things — the seafood, the recreation, the tourism, the renewable energy, flood defences — are all things that we can put tangible values on. Usually, we have to put other capital inputs in like financial inputs, human inputs, manufactured capital and social capital. There is an ecological end point, and it is important to realise that one system is dependent on the other. Why is that important? Because, as I say, if we want to continue to maintain the goods and benefits that we get, we need to value those goods and benefits, but we also need to understand their dependence on the condition of the natural capital of the environment and the flows.

Natural capital accounting is just a logical extension of this. It is a tool to measure the changes in the stock and the condition of the natural capital at a variety of scales but also to integrate the value of the ecosystem services into accounting and reporting systems. We have physical accounts, and we have economic accounts when we do natural capital accounting.

Why would we do it? Well, we want to have a sustainable blue growth strategy. There is an increasing use of the seas, which is the “blue growth” part of the thing, and it is to support EU policies, commercial regulation, commercial systems regulation and management, licensing and planning for conflicting uses. We want to protect the environment so we need to understand the value of it. It also helps to raise awareness. I have put a few EU, national and international policies down here like the International Maritime Organization convention on ballast water management, the marine planning directive and the common fisheries policy et cetera that it supports.

When I talk about value, people often say, “I don't like the idea that we're monetising the environment — that we're actually putting a monetary value on it”, and I say to them, “Well, value is a measure of importance whether it is done in monetary terms or other terms. It's still a measure of importance”. There are two sides to this: it is not just the importance but whose value, whose measure? A lot of economic values assume that individuals are rational, that they have well defined and stable preferences over alternative outcomes and that they actually understand those. It is based on utilitarianism and substitutability: people have choices; they can take this or take that; they can understand the trade-offs to make. I am not sure that, with the environment, those always follow. Then there are community-based values. They are the ones that people are often more comfortable with about the environment: the social values, the assumption that individuals make choices based on what, they think, is good for society as a whole rather than what is good for individuals. Of course, it is usually a mixture of the two.

We have a whole bunch of approaches and methodologies to do this. There is revealed preferences, revealed values: things like the market values — “How much do we pay for our

fish?” — the cost of travel to get to the seaside; the incremental cost that is added to the value of housing because it is close to the sea. Then, there is stated preference: people actually saying, “Well, this is what I think it’s worth. This is how much I’d pay to keep more whales in the sea or to be able to go and see dolphins or to know that there are still polar bears in the Arctic”. We can transfer some of those values, if we have them, from one place to another.

Then, we get to the more qualitative things: measure of attitudes, preferences and intentions. We start to get much more into the social values and civic valuation using citizens’ juries. Stephen will talk a bit more about those in more detail and how they are used.

This report from a bunch of social economists and marine environmental economists made a number of recommendations and key action suggestions. I will give you a quick overview of some of those.

We very much feel that we need to include ecosystem valuation in marine management decision models. We have a lot of tools to do that. My feeling is we need to just get on and start doing it to support marine management and policy decision making, to help us understand trade-offs and to actually think about sustainability by thinking about what natural capital we are losing in any cost-benefit analysis so that we can match that against the growth of economic capital; in other words, bringing the externalised costs into our cost-benefit analysis.

All of this — this is a picture of Plymouth — is partially based on good research from natural scientists out at sea. We need to understand the ecosystem that we are working with. Another thing is to actually get a better set of indicators for ecosystem services that can be included under existing monitoring programmes. Under the marine strategy framework directive, we monitor for good environmental status. It is not necessarily the same thing as monitoring for “Are we maintaining the assets that we need for our ecosystem services?”, but we actually still need to improve some of the understanding of which aspects of marine biodiversity and which processes are important. We need to understand when we will reach tipping points, when we will actually hit the point of the system where we move into a system that we do not want to move into.

There is a lot of discussion amongst researchers about different ecosystems service frameworks — this is probably a little bit into the research realms — but we need to standardise and harmonise them. There is a lot of activity at UN and EU levels to do so. We need to create open databases to support this work. Scientists are quite reticent about sharing data. It gets quite complicated. You have big databases; it’s difficult, and we need to do as much as we can to be able to share what data is available to help people understand the methodology that was used. So again it’s a slightly nerdy thing, but it’s quite important to support scientists to be able to share their data, but also to consider other values — as well as the economic values, the shared values, the social values and where the health comes in.

Trans-disciplinary collaboration is really important in this, and I’m really lucky that I have funding to do some trans-disciplinary research that does bring in marine scientists, natural scientists, fisheries biologists, ecosystem modellers, public health experts, environmental psychologists, economists and social scientists. All of these are coming together in a project, and the more projects we can do like that, the better we get an understanding of how these things relate to each other.

We need to think about scale and boundaries for each valuation study, and maybe this is quite relevant to you. You have to think that a lot of the use and abuse of the system doesn’t necessarily happen where you see the impacts of it. Agricultural runoff is a big problem in

terms of waste at sea. Excess nutrients from fertilisers can run off into the sea, or in fact pathogens from animals on land, so we have problems. We have one guy who's trying to grow mussels offshore. He can't sell his mussels because they have pathogens in them. The pathogens probably come from cattle farming on land, transported down the rivers, off the catchment, down the rivers and out to his mussel farm, and his mussel farm is de facto doing the waste remediation for the farmers on land. The people who dwell in the cities are the ones who often come to get the leisure and recreation. The fish are eaten by people at the coast, but also people from the cities and people from inland, so there's a lot of spatial stuff at that scale.

And some of the boundaries are administrative boundaries. A lot of marine species are very mobile. We need cooperation at local, regional and international scale to be able to make these assessments and to undertake the trade-off analysis. So the one problem that might happen in Irish waters — something that might be good in Irish waters may be a problem in English waters and vice versa, for example. And we need to continue to develop this natural capital approach and natural capital accounting. We need to enhance and standardise the way we do marine asset assessment and valuation and the reporting of results. We need to think about the issues like scale and aggregation — these quite difficult things. Particularly we need to develop financing mechanisms which can improve the sustainable use of marine natural capital.

I'm going to end it there and pass over to Stephen next. Thank you. *[Applause.]*

Dr Stephen Hynes (National University of Ireland, Galway):

Thanks, Melanie, and thanks to the Assembly for inviting me here to speak today. In particular, thanks to Deputy Crowe, who I understand has read the report. As academics, we always like to hear of our representatives reading our work, so pleased to hear that.

I just want to talk to you a bit about a report we did here last year on valuing Ireland's blue ecosystem services. And I realise the screens here are quite small, so some of the figures you won't be able to see, but I will talk through them. So, yeah, and some of these reports — copies are available outside.

Basically here we just wanted to profile the marine ecosystem services that are derived from Irish seas and look at maybe some of the gaps that are there in terms of research — and, importantly, to provide some data to ongoing work and to the relevant agencies here at home, particularly in terms of the marine strategy framework directive, where an initial assessment was required to be undertaken and where this data fed in there. And also we've made it available in terms of the agencies working here on the new national maritime spatial plan for Ireland as well.

I suppose, going back a bit from this, we had our first integrated marine policy or integrated marine plan launched here in Ireland, called 'Harnessing our Ocean Wealth', back in 2012.

And, you know, this was a new departure — well, it was the first time we had an integrated marine plan, but it was also very much focused on trying to bring together activity going on across different Departments and making it a more joined-up thinking in relation to how we use our marine resources. And, in particular, the 'Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth' had three major goals: to establish a thriving maritime economy, healthy ecosystems and better engagement with the sea, so ocean-related literacy as well. And, on the back of this, you had interdepartmental marine steering group set up, chaired by the relevant Minister, Minister for Agriculture and Marine. At the moment, Minister Michael Creed is the chair. And that

brought together the different Departments involved in the area of the marine environment to try and work together to come up with joint thinking on how we might manage and make the most of our marine resources.

3.15 pm

And we have substantial marine resources here in Ireland. You're talking about an area 10 times the size of the land area; we have sovereign rights over an area of approximately 800,000 kilometres squared. So, we go from —. When we take in the sea bed, or the sovereign area that we have rights over in terms of sea bed, we go from one of the smallest member states in Europe to one of the largest. And, in terms of 'Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth', it was very much focused on how do we foster growth across all the different ocean economy industries, from shipping, aquaculture, fisheries and some of the new emerging industries in terms of renewable energy — marine renewable energy, marine commerce and the other sectors within the ocean economy. So, they set targets, in particular two headline targets of doubling the value of the ocean wealth to 2.4% of GDP by 2030 and to increase the turnover from the ocean economy to exceed €6.4 billion by 2020. And there was a number of sector-specific targets within that; I won't go through them all here. But we would have been, I suppose, as a head of a small unit in the National University of Ireland Galway — the socioeconomic marine research unit — we'd be probably best known for putting together the ocean economy statistics for the marine coordination group chaired by Minister Creed and funded through the Marine Institute. And they are very keen to get those figures off us each year to see how they're progressing under the targets set out in 'Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth'. I suppose where we come back to ecosystem services and marine ecosystem services, within 'Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth', it was identified a key action — there was a key action within the integrated marine plan that stated that there was a gap here, we needed more work to look at the valuation of marine ecosystem services, that we didn't have enough information here in Ireland on that topic, and that information was seen as being vital for good planning and good management.

So, 'Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth', while it was all about fostering growth in these ocean economy industries, it was also about, very much from an economic perspective, it could be viewed as maximising the net benefits we get as a society here from our ocean resources, and, to do that, we need to know — we need to have a multiple lens on the blue economy, so we need to go beyond just the inner core here of the ocean economy statistics and start thinking about what are those other ecosystem service benefits that Melanie outlined there? What are they? What are their values? Can we value them? And, even if we can't value them, just to identify them cos it's important that we take them into consideration in any planning that goes on. And this is a nice way of looking at that; if we start off in the core there — ocean economy — and the turnover figures, employment associated marine-related activities, but, outside that, there's other ecosystem services that we get from the marine environment as a society that are not seen; they're often indirect, they're non-use values, and, again, if we don't take them into account in terms of a cost-benefit analysis, we may outweigh the benefits of the development of a certain industry if we don't factor in these benefits that we might lose in terms of marine ecosystem services.

I don't think you'll be able to read this, so I'm gonna skip through this, but it basically just shows where the economist, I suppose, comes in in terms of using the economics tool kit in terms of a cost-benefit analysis, where —. We have the marine ecosystem management on top there. They're looking at how we maybe maintain the functions and processes of marine ecosystems. From that, we get to ecosystem services are delivered. From those ecosystem services, society derives benefits, and then we step in, I suppose, as economists and we look

at, “Well, what are the value of those benefits? How do we measure them? How do we incorporate them into national income accounts frameworks? How do we use them in a cost-benefit analysis situation?”.

And based on how those values change, there’s going to be behavioural change of society, which hopefully feeds back, maybe through something like the marine coordination group again, to making decisions again in terms of how we manage those resources.

So, in terms of the report then, there’s a number of classification systems we can use to frame out marine ecosystem services. In this case, we use what’s called the common international classification system of ecosystem services. Melanie talked about some of those categories here. I won’t go into them here but this is basically the framework now that has been adopted by the EU and it is the one that you will see used by DG marine affairs and others, and I suppose it would’ve originated at the UN. And this is — you know, we started to look at: well, what does Irish society get from the marine waters we have here? And it’s important to know we don’t try and value everything here. We can quantify something. Some things we can’t even quantify but, for example, here we can talk about capture fisheries, offshore capture fisheries in terms of the tons of landings [*Inaudible*] values, water use for non-drinking purposes, so you know, what’s that there? Over one billion metres cubed of water is used by power stations here just to — as a coolant. Sea water is used. We don’t try and put any value on that but I’m just highlighting its use. The amount of waste that goes out, that we allow the waste assimilation, the marine environment takes waste from our waste plants and it brings —. It does a certain amount of waste assimilation for us as well. So we can quantify some of these measures.

Others we can actually put values on and so, in the report, we talk — we can put values on offshore capture fisheries, and, of course, like every member state, it’s not just the Irish fleet operating in Irish waters, so you’re talking about €472 million worth there of landings from Irish waters by all the fleets operating in Irish waters. Closer to home, the inshore fleet is Irish and that’s worth about 42 million. Of course, we have aquaculture activity, which is very important, particularly along the west coast of Ireland, and particularly maybe in areas that maybe there isn’t a huge amount of other employment opportunities.

The more difficult ones to measure are what Melanie mentioned: regulating marine ecosystem services. So, again, we can use values from the literature here. We have, like I said, there’s waste services that are provided by the marine environment. There’s discharges into our estuaries and into coastal areas. These plants, they bring the water up to a certain level, but it’s not up to total — it’s not up at reuse levels. So, it’s discharged into the marine environment and the marine environment, within certain limits, is able to assimilate that waste. And that is an important service provided by the marine environment. So, we can work out what’s the cost of providing — if we had to do that ourselves, bring it up to reuse standard, what would that cost? And we could use those costs as a measure of the benefit of that service provided by the marine environment, something we don’t often think about. Of course then, it’s carbon sequestration. Huge resource out there. 30% of carbon dioxide emissions are sequestered by the marine environment. Again, so a massive service there and we can put a value on that because we have a market for our carbon so we can generate estimates for that, as we do. And, again, that will vary depending on the ecosystem’s type; whether it’s estuarine environment, coastal or offshore.

Cultural marine ecosystems that Melanie mentioned there. Again, 1.6 billion is an estimate we came up with here for recreational services. People go down to the sea, they go for a walk on the beach, they go for a swim. Generally, you don’t pay for that but it does have value. In

economic parlance, we talk about that enters your utility function. You get value from it. So, how do we incorporate that kind of value into a decision-making process. We want that taken into account if something is going to — a development is going to happen that may affect that recreational asset. And there is ways — Melanie mentioned a few of them — that we can measure, that we can actually put values on. Using things like the travel-cost approach is one.

On the cultural, scientific and educational — is a scientific and educational element of ecosystem services here. Again, we can put a value on that based on the turnover, I suppose, in terms of fees for those type of courses in our educational facilities. And an important one: aesthetic services. What is the added value to our housing stock from having a sea view? And again we use hydraulic price models to tease that out. We know, just in the same way that an extra bedroom is going to add value to a house, having a sea view, I think you'll all agree, will add substantially to the price of a house.

Again, that adds to the stock value of the house, but we can convert that into a flow value as well, and we can tease that out. We are doing some work here with Ronan Lyons, some of the Irish delegates will know, who worked at Daft.ie, teasing out what it means in terms of having access to marine resources in terms of proximity to the coastline and to beaches but having a sea view as well.

We can bring this all together. This slide is showing where fish are being caught in Irish waters, and, just to paint a picture, we overlaid swept area ratios — what areas are being trawled — and we overlaid that on special areas of conservation, sensitive biological areas, and we can start to build a picture.

In terms of joined-up thinking, are we fishing appropriately and where are we fishing? So, we add: what is the value, where is this being landed and so forth? So, we start building up the picture, and this was being produced as well as part of the EU mapping of ecosystem service project that has been ongoing.

Just to wrap up before questions, in terms of the ocean economy ecosystems we put together, there's a high level of awareness of those. They're used, as I mentioned, to set economic targets under harnessing our ocean wealth, and to examine the progress in certain industries versus other countries. We are always in constant demand for more in-depth information from industry representative groups as well in terms of just showing where their industries are going.

There's less awareness and use, though, in terms of the ecosystem service values, and that was part of the idea of producing this report. There has been some limited usage in the initial assessment for the marine strategy framework directive. The data has been handed over to those who are working on the maritime spatial plan that's being drafted. It's used in the EU marine mapping and ecosystem service assessment that's been taking place as well.

So, we are working on developing accounts that look at what has been spent in terms of environmental expenditures relating to not just marine but other environmental protection in the terrestrial environment as well. There's a number of ongoing specific marine ecosystem valuation exercises.

As an economist, we're almost trying to value the change in the environmental good. In this case, we were painting a broad picture just to get the message out there. This was very much an educational tool as well, just to, you know, get the conversation going, and that has been working quite effectively. But it is a bit of a straw man, I suppose, to be knocked down in terms of the techniques used even though we stand over everything in there.

But if there is a particular project going on, as an economist, I'm interested in knowing, "Well, there's a new port facility going to be built. What are the ecosystem service benefits, maybe, that are going to be lost?" Of course, there's massive economic benefits to that port but we want to build in anything maybe that will be lost in terms of lost benefit values.

So, just to factor in marine ecosystem services values into ocean economy account frameworks may help to ensure a sustainable blue economy for Ireland by making sure that the growth in the ocean economy does not exceed the carrying capacity of the marine environment.

Just that final point: we're not saying that everything should be valued or that decisions should be solely based on these values. Not at all. It's just another tool in the tool box. It adds information and, I think, is a very useful tool. People can wrap their heads around values, especially if you can get them into economic terms. It's not always possible but I think it does add important information.

I think the message is getting out here. A friend of mine from County Mayo sent me this, and I was quite impressed that he was thinking along these lines, but, of course, there were other reasons he was sending this to me. It wasn't so much his concern about the marine environment; he was sending me a message about his favourite team, his Mayo football team — the Irish delegates will have to explain that one to the rest of you, maybe, later over dinner.

So, thank you very much. I'll leave it at that.

3.30 pm

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

So, who wants to ask some questions? Juan? Can we maybe do two or three and maybe indicate who you want to ask the question, or maybe both?

The Hon Juan Watterson SHK:

Juan Watterson, Speaker of the House of Keys in the Isle of Man, and chartered accountant. I'm just wondering if you've done any work with standard setters, especially at the national level, Ipsos and things like that, to establish whether this is something that can actually ultimately end up in the national accounting system, national accounting framework with these assets, and also the positive and negatives as they go through.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Linda, do you want to come in?

Linda Fabiani MSP:

It's probably more a question for Melanie, but what struck me about a very interesting double presentation was that, again, we had — I'm being simplistic here — but, on one hand, we had the environmental values, and on the other hand we had the economic values. That to me would always seem to be the issue that goes on when we discuss such things. And I was interested in Melanie talking about transdisciplinary connections on a local, regional and international basis. This morning — I can't remember who brought it up — but that thing about joined-up thinking: how do we link all these things together? I was thinking about, for example, city deals, which the ambassador mentioned at one point, a new one for Derry, and we also have city deals in Scotland and, I presume, in the rest of the UK. They are very much based on a presumption of economic benefit. Time has moved on and we're now talking

about climate emergency, all these different things. Is it time for a rethink on some of the things that we do so that we are, in fact, looking at the whole value system and deciding what our values are, rather than, for example, continuing to build roads when, on the other hand, we're talking about cutting down on car use? That's on a domestic basis. But then when you look internationally as well — and it's not as simple as saying others aren't doing their bit — but sometimes we collude in that too. And I would say, for example, that the huge issues that are going on now environmentally on the Tibetan Plateau that doesn't get talked about much — this is maybe one for Melanie — and the effect that is going to have both environmentally on land and on marine, yet we seem to be very, very loathe to complain about that publicly because of the economic relationship with China. So, from a professor's point of view, are we kidding ourselves quite a lot of the time because we're not really grasping at the real issues?

Professor Melanie Austen:

Both lovely questions, and challenging as well. In a way, there's a sort of answer to both of them simultaneously. So, just taking the UK point of view. Natural capital accounting is coming into the UK accounts. There's a whole team in DEFRA who actually work on that, and I actually sit on the natural capital committee in the UK which advises the English Government, I think, and the bit of the UK Government for the shared bits of the sea. So, we actually advise on that. So, there is that thinking, and, going to your question, I think that thinking is happening in the UK in terms of bringing natural capital thinking into all sorts of aspects of decision-making. Is it happening fast enough? Is it happening at local levels, regional levels, national levels, international levels, fast enough? Well, as a scientist, I'm always going to say no. I think there's too much conservatism about being absolutely sure that we're doing things the right way before we just get on and do it. That's some advice that may well come out of a natural capital committee quite soon, is that we just need to get on and do it.

I'm not going to comment on Tibet, because I don't know enough about that. I do know that you recently saw last week that the international Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services put out its first major report on an assessment of the state of biodiversity, and the crucial thing is: is the state of biodiversity and the state of the natural capital sufficient to support the flows that we want and that we need to maintain? And it is all about — and it's why I've kind of gone over, as far as many of my colleagues are concerned, to the dark side of economics and social science and health science, because actually we have to work together, across these disciplines, to make it clear that you can't just go ahead with economic growth without considering all of the environmental externalities that are actually implicit in doing so.

Being idealistic I would love it if we could change and move forward so that things really develop and we actually do really start to do that but it's, it's — it is step by step but I think we can go faster and that's where I think the Irish report is brilliant because they've actually done it; they've gone ahead and put values on things and moved it. And we did it in the national league eco assessment in the UK but I think they've gone a step forward and done more in the marine environment that we have in the UK, yeah.

Dr Stephen Hynes:

If I just add to that, just in relation to the first question there, yeah, the Irish, I suppose, the relevant authorities are looking into how do we incorporate these eco systems service values into the national income account framework as well, so the CSO has taken that first step and they've been developing these environmental expenditure accounts. Now, and there is — they have a responsibility to continue on and develop that further and bring in these values,

take them into account in the — in what we consider, you know, national income. Now, it is a very difficult process and there is a huge body of work going on, particularly at the UN level, in relation to how do we do this and there's issues around the type of data we gather here. In particular, one key issue with bringing these values into a national income account framework is the fact that a lot of these values are — they're nett benefit values; to be incorporated into a national income account framework it needs to be revenue or needs, yeah — it needs to be, you know, it's the sales value of the output that is recorded in our national income accounts. So, that isn't — the values we talk about here in some cases they're — in some cases they are revenues; we could talk about the landings value of fish for example but in other cases, you know, the costs, the eco system service is measured as, you know, the costs of not having to build a coastal defence because we have kelp forests that give us protection from those storm surges and protect the land behind so there're different values and that's a key issue here is how do we convert those into exchange rate — not exchange rate — into exchange values that we can use in these account frameworks. But there is a lot of work going on here in relation to that. I don't want to get too technical but in terms of say the recreational values they're what we call consumer surplus values and again they're not appropriate to include either in the national income account framework. So, we have to —. There's a lot of questions yet to be answered there but there is a lot of work going on and there is a requirement now. I suppose we have to keep in mind as well that, you know, I think it was only in the late 1940s that national income accounts started really to become generated on an annual basis and they had to — they were scratching their head then to figure out how we're going to get all this information together. So, I think we will get there but it's a — I think it will take a little bit of time.

Just on the second point to follow up on Melanie's comment there, I think we do — as an economist I think I have to defend the dark side a bit here — I think we, you know, the beauty of this whole area of eco system services, it's a language everyone can get around the table, you know, so the scientists are coming in — you couldn't probably see my framework there — but they are coming in talking about the functions and processes of the marine eco systems. We come in further down that eco system cascade where we're saying, well, these are the values of the best services we — sorry, these are the values associated with the benefits we get from the eco system services and we meet in the middle there around eco system services. So, I mean, I've been involved in a number of projects now where we rely on the scientists to tell us what is going to change in terms of the eco system services because of underlying change in the eco system for whatever reason and they create the scenario that we then try and put a value on in terms of the loss — if it's loss of benefits or increase in benefits if that's the case. So, I think, you know, it's a good framework for interdisciplinary research.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Any questions, no? OK.

I'd like to thank Professor Austen and Dr Hynes for their thought provoking and illuminating contribution to the Assembly's debate and also to commend their great work and I'm sure that they're available to talk to members if people have questions for later on. So I really appreciate your time and energy.

**TOWARDS A NEW COMMON CHAPTER – A GRASS ROOTS VISION FOR
COOPERATION BETWEEN NORTHERN IRELAND AND IRELAND, AND
BETWEEN THE ISLAND OF IRELAND AND GREAT BRITAIN**

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you, Seán. We're going to move on to our next session this afternoon, which is a panel discussion entitled, "Towards a New Common Charter". So, many of our members come from border and regional areas, and the challenges faced by rural communities will be familiar to many people in this room. We're going to further explore the challenges facing these areas with our next panel of speakers, and so I would like to welcome the following to our panel discussion: Dr Anthony Soares, who will be joined by his colleague Gary English, board member of the Rural Community Network. Our guest speakers will take a few minutes each, which will leave time for contributions and questions from the floor and the responses from our panellists.

Dr Anthony Soares (Centre for Cross Border Studies):

Good afternoon, everyone. I would like to begin by thanking the Co-Chairs of this Assembly and the members of this Assembly for giving me this opportunity to speak to you about the new common charter for cooperation within and between these islands. I'm particularly pleased to be here because of the very nature of this Assembly; this body of legislators, of parliamentarians from across these islands, who exchange views, have this opportunity to socialise, to speak to each other to get to know each other and to talk about what the issues are for their various administrations and for various Parliaments and Assemblies.

It's also appropriate because I see that one of the topics that you've been devoting much of your attention at this plenary is climate change and climate action. Climate change doesn't respect borders; I know it's simplistic to say, but it's true nevertheless. And Climate Action demands cooperation across and within these islands and further field.

My name is Anthony Soares; I am the acting director of the Centre for Cross Border Studies (CCBS). Joining me today is Mr Gary English, a board member of the Rural Community Network, which is one of the organisations that's helped to develop this new common charter for cooperation within and between these islands.

I'll begin by just saying a few words about the Centre for Cross Border Studies; what it does. So, it was founded in 1999, it's based in Armagh, Northern Ireland, and its core mission is to contribute to increase the social, economic and territorial cohesion of the island of Ireland, and it does this by encouraging and promoting and improving the quality of cooperation between public bodies, mainly in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland but further afield as well, and also cooperation between public bodies, businesses and civil society.

CCBS also tries to work to improve the capacity of people involved in social and economic development to engage in mutually beneficial cross-border cooperation. Finally, we also address information gaps and other barriers that constrain cross-border mobility and cross-border cooperation through research, provision of resources, tools and other support.

Just so that you understand how we frame some of the work — well, a lot of the work — that we do, there are two main pillars — policy pillars — that we have used to inform our work. One is the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, and in particular strands two and three of that agreement. So, strand two, the relations between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and strand 3 that involves the relations across these islands, which includes the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands as well, not just Great Britain and the island of Ireland. We have also used as another of our policy pillars the European Union's cohesion policy, with its focus on social, economic and territorial cohesion, which is supported by the EU's territorial cooperation and structural funds programmes.

3.45 pm

Throughout its existence since 1999, the centre has been deeply concerned with community, social and economic development and cooperation, particularly on the island of Ireland but also between the island of Ireland, Great Britain and beyond. It is this concern that informed the centre's desire to initiate a project called the Towards a New Common Chapter project. Now, just to alert you, the project was called Towards a New Common Chapter, but the document that has eventually evolved in community organisations is actually called the 'New Common Charter', and I'll explain why later on.

So this project, the Towards a New Common Chapter project, began in late 2014. I must acknowledge the fact that it was made possible with the generous support of the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, Northern Ireland's Community Relations Council, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's reconciliation fund. The project looked to support and inspire grassroots community commitment to cross-border cooperation in all its dimensions; cooperation at the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland; wider North/South cooperation across the island of Ireland, but also east-west cooperation between the island of Ireland and Great Britain. Here, I must make an apology to those representing the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. It has become shorthand just to refer to the island of Ireland and Great Britain but, in fact, we do think about the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, and, in fact, we had initially hoped to have one of our recent gatherings of all the groups in this project in the Isle of Man, but eventually it happened in Belfast.

Its work is towards a bottom-up vision of the importance and role of cross-border cooperation within and between these islands while also noting the need for community groups to possess the skills and capacity — so not only to engage in their own cross-border initiatives, but to enter into more productive dialogues with relevant local, regional and central Government policies and strategies. So it's that attempt to allow or encourage community organisations to be involved when local councils, regional bodies, central Governments and regional Administrations are talking about policies which may have an effect on border regions or where cooperation between the various bodies would actually make sense. It's to allow communities to actually contribute to those conversations; to take part in them on a cross-border basis or cross-jurisdictional basis.

The original inspiration for the project came from the commitment to cooperation by the Governments in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland expressed in a chapter of agreed text that appeared in Northern Ireland's structural funds plan and Ireland's national development plan for the period 2000 to 2006; what eventually became known as the Common Chapter. Although, just to point out, versions of it preceded this, in those versions, for the Northern Ireland part, the policy development was the responsibility of the UK Government. The novelty around this particular period is the fact that the input for the Northern Ireland part was from the newly devolved Administration of Northern Ireland following the Belfast Good Friday Agreement.

However, that period, the 2000 to 2006 period, unfortunately also saw the collapse of the power-sharing institutions in Northern Ireland as well as the suspension of the North/South Ministerial Council. Their restoration in 2007 following the St Andrews Agreement did not result in the revival of the Common Chapter. The Centre for Cross Border Studies had frequently referred to the omission of the Common Chapter or the fact that it was not revived as perhaps leading to the marginalisation of and political commitment to cross-border cooperation, particularly at times of political or economic crisis.

Just to point out to you, earlier drafts of what is now the new Common Charter included a section reflecting what community groups do not want in relation to cross-border or cross-

jurisdictional cooperation if it's to be successful. This included how it should not be the unique preserve of any one Government, agency group or community; that it should not be used for party-political purposes or be driven by the need to achieve large impacts in a way that privileges the involvement of larger institutions and organisations thereby dismissing the value of micro-community initiatives and their potential to contribute to significant positive change.

However, at the meeting bringing together representatives of community groups from across these islands — so from the island of Ireland, from Scotland, England and Wales — who were brought together to agree a final version of what is now the new common charter, it was decided to omit this section from the document — this section talking about what you should not do around cross-border cooperation — although they said that they did want that section to be included in a separate document, perhaps as a set of guiding principles for policymakers when looking at cross-border or cross-jurisdiction cooperation.

'The New Common Charter for Cooperation Within and Between these Islands' is therefore the result of a series of intensive and sometimes difficult conversations between a range of community groups from Northern Ireland and Ireland and, more recently, with groups from England, Scotland and Wales. The new common charter represents a shared desire to maintain and strengthen relations between communities across these islands to work together on issues of common concern and to advocate for the provision of the requisite structures and means to cooperate within and between these islands in whatever circumstances may arise.

The Towards a New Common Chapter project has now entered its final funded phase. This involves bringing the new common charter for cooperation to the direct attention of legislators and policymakers across all relevant jurisdictions. This process began last week, on Thursday, in fact, at a meeting with the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, and it is continuing here, today, at the 58th plenary session of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly.

In light of this Assembly's nature, and given that the sets of relations envisioned within the new common charter for cooperation reflect the core strands of the Good Friday Agreement, which include not only the relationships within Northern Ireland, the relationship between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland but also its east-west dimension, we would ask Members here to support it and work with us in ensuring that all Administrations across these islands put in place policies and funding structures to encourage cross-border and cross-jurisdictional cooperation at grass-roots community level. We hope that today offers an opportunity to discuss in greater detail the work undertaken as part of the project and how members of this Assembly and political representatives more generally can champion the objectives of the new common charter for cooperation.

These objectives include how capacity-building measures should be introduced to improve how all levels of government — that is central, regional and local government as well as public bodies across these islands — engage with community organisations in the development of policies and strategies of cross-border or cross-jurisdictional dimension, as well as the need for a comprehensive assessment of the current funding landscape for cross-border and cross-jurisdictional cooperation initiatives aimed at community organisations and what that landscape should look like going forward. They also include the development of a mechanism for dialogue and cooperation between grass-roots organisations across these islands, mirroring and perhaps interacting with bodies such as the British-Irish Council and this very Assembly.

So, along with advice on how we should bring ‘The New Common Charter for Cooperation Within and Between these Islands’ to a wider audience of legislators and policymakers across these islands, this project would be very grateful for this Assembly’s concrete support in achieving the objectives outlined above. What we are looking for, essentially, is an opportunity for communities across these islands to engage in the same activity, the same dialogue, the same understanding, the same opportunity to converse, to share what challenges they experience, to identify opportunities, that they have those same opportunities that you have here, and perhaps, in that way, to increase levels of understanding between peoples within and between these islands. Thank you, and I am open questions, along with my colleague Gary. *[Applause.]*

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much. You’re not going to speak? Sorry. Straight to questions?

Mr Gary English (Rural Community Network):

I’m not going to say too much. I think we just leave it open to questions and answer them. I think we would be better doing that. OK?

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Right. OK. Who would like to go first? So, I think we have Senator Frank Feighan. And any other — anyone else want to —? OK. Thank you.

Senator Frank Feighan:

Thanks, Anthony, and thanks, Gary. I’ll be brief enough because I have already posed a few questions at the Oireachtas Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement last Thursday. But this is very, very welcome and, as you rightly said, it’s an initiative to empower civic society to drive cross-border, North/South and east-west co-operation across the island.

You’re looking for support from legislators etc. You’ve talked about all the musical and literary and other artistic cultural traditions and/or expressions spread across the world and also value in languages, whose roots may cross the borders within/between our islands, and it’s a question I asked the British Ambassador already: from a political point of view, what more can we do regarding the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, or do you’ve any views on what we can do, as politicians, to mirror this wonderful initiative through the political institutions? Thank you.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Would you like to answer that question? Thank you.

Dr Anthony Soares:

Thank you, Senator, for that question. You mentioned there the reference to the ties, the relations that exist within and between these islands in terms of culture, sports, faith, churches, languages. That section, I have to point out, was something that I never thought about, it was actually the groups themselves. They insisted that that section be included because they wanted to reflect the fact that we mustn’t forget that those relationships exist, including family relationships, that tie us across these islands. That people travel to work from one part of the island of Ireland and might go to England, Scotland and Wales to work. So, there are all sorts of relationships that they value and that they want to maintain and, in fact, they want to strengthen. I think that this Assembly has a role in assisting that and

entering into a dialogue with communities around how we ensure that those relations, all of those relations, aren't just maintained but are, in fact, strengthened.

I have to reflect the fact that, in terms of the work that we did with lots of community groups, initially on the island of Ireland — and it was particularly there that this happened, but we also saw that happening when we moved to Scotland, England and Wales — there is a lack of knowledge sometimes about how we understand each other. For example — I'm gonna refer to an anecdote or something that actually happened — I have to also stress the fact that this work began in late 2014 and the work with community groups began in 2015, so this is well before the "B" word became an issue for community groups especially; all of this was happening before that — but there was an incident of a political party from Northern Ireland interacting with the UK Government and the joke — people were kind of joking about the fact that this particular occasion, they were saying, led to the breakdown of the Internet because of English journalists trying to find out who these particular political representatives were. At one point, we kind of decided that this isn't actually very funny because this particular political party had actually been sitting in the House of Commons for quite a while, there are other political parties from Northern Ireland with representation in the House of Commons and that lack of knowledge is actually disturbing. We actually went and asked and started having a debate around who amongst those groups knew who the First Minister of Scotland was. Who is the First Minister of Wales? Who is the Taoiseach? Why is the Tánaiste? And the lack —. The answers were very rare in terms of people who knew. So, it reflects this lack of knowledge that we have of each other, which, at times of political and economic crisis, can actually lead us down a very difficult, a very challenging path.

So, I think that, in terms of your question, Senator, in terms of what this Assembly can do, it's encouraging, supporting that interaction, but at community level, at civic society level, that we are enabled to have the same kinds of exchanges that you have here — which we think are absolutely vital — the dialogue that you have here as parliamentarians, that civic society should also be able to do that so that, perhaps, that we could institute some kind of network that reflects the work that you are doing here and contribute to the work and enter into a productive dialogue with this Assembly and with other institutions created under the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement that reflect the totality of relations within and between these islands.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much. John Blair.

4.00 pm

Mr John Blair:

Thank you, and I can thank Anthony and Gary for the presentation. The question I was going to ask is very similar to that which was asked previously, but I will try to develop it in a slightly separate theme if I can and say, first of all, that I am heartened by the previous reply and the fact that people, who were consultees, are trying to look beyond divisions of the past, as it were, in a community relations context and look to that which is shared already, in the field of sports or arts or various other arenas.

I think the sum total of what we have heard today, and what is in the report before us, is that perhaps the past 20 years has taught us to share politics and political institutions but not perhaps share so well at community level and at various levels of community structures. It is that on which, I think, we have to build. Given the replies that have been received already and the detail we that have been given, can I ask that, rather than simply look to the institutions

that are represented in this Assembly, should we also be looking to local government, to the various public bodies in Northern Ireland that represent the fields of arts and sports and other things and should we be bringing in from those people their expertise? And in addition to that should we be pledging that community relations, as we know it, should be committed to — as well as examining the divisions of the past — be looking to design a better future in equal measure?

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you. Who would like to answer that?

Dr Anthony Soares:

I will answer that briefly, and perhaps then Gary can talk about the rural aspect of this.

I think that is a pertinent question. Specifically, local government is the closest level of government to communities, and it has an enormous role to play. I refer specifically to the case of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and, in particular, the border region. Local government is really important in terms of enabling cooperation across that border for social and economic development. On the island of Ireland there are three local authority-led cross-border networks that cooperate with each other. There is the East Border Region, the Irish Central Border Area Network; and there is also an equivalent in the north-west, between Donegal and Derry and Strabane. And they do vital work in terms of cross-border cooperation at that local authority level.

There is more than can be done, in terms of local authorities involving more closely communities. Perhaps some occasions arise where local authorities may have dialogues, and develop strategies and policies together on a cross-border basis. But in terms of, sometimes, their consultation with communities, they return back to their jurisdiction; so that the local authority from Northern Ireland consults with the community in Northern Ireland and the local authority from the Republic of Ireland consults with its communities in the Republic of Ireland. They do not give the same opportunities for the communities themselves to come together on a cross-border basis and speak about that particular issue; and see whether they have any contribution to make, whether they agree with the priorities being set by the local authorities. I am not saying that that happens on every location; I am just saying that there is some more work to be done there. Local authorities are doing a great job, but they do need further support in that way.

On the island of Ireland, in particular in the border region, a lot of it is rural and sparsely populated, with particular challenges arising from that which is actually something that affects Northern Ireland in particular; let us say, in terms of the challenges of peripherality arising from rurality.

And again, there are conversations happening — and perhaps Gary might say a couple of words on this — in terms of rural community groups. We are not saying that rural community groups do not speak to each other; they do. And in fact, rural community groups speak within and across these islands as well. The Rural Community Network, of which Gary is a board member, speaks with its counterparts in Wales in particular, but also in England and Scotland. So those debates are happening; but again, perhaps there is an opportunity here for some cross-dialogues between interest sectors, particular issues and interests.

Perhaps Gary might want to say something about Rural Community Network's role?

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Karin Smyth. I'm sorry. OK.

Mr Gary English:

The RCN supports 'A New Common Charter'. It provides a framework to encourage cooperation among civic society, groups on the island of Ireland and between Ireland and Britain. Many of the challenges rural communities face are similar. RCN needs to set aside time and resources to build new relationships and deepen current relationships, and this Assembly can probably help with that.

Karin Smyth:

Thank you, Chair, and thank you both for coming. Sorry, I came in a bit late, but it's really interesting and timely, so thank you for your time and for coming. I'm not sure I've got a real question, just a comment. I have family who live in Cavan and Fermanagh. I have travelled across, and spend a lot of time in, Scotland, and I spend most of my holidays in Wales, and I'm an English MP, so the commonality and the differences across these islands I do feel very personally and politically. I think that's one of the reasons why this is an interesting body and a really great body to be part of. I've said this before in the House of Commons: we're not currently short of Committees, groups or discussions forums around the North/South or even, indeed, some of the east-west discussions and these sorts of things both formally and possibly, in the future, informally, whichever kind of agreement we've got. Trying to find a home for them and really exploiting the great things they do is really difficult, and I guess, I don't have an answer to that. I think you're at an open door really, and it is for people like us to consider how this body may build on some of that and for our own respective Parliaments and bodies to know about the work and think about how we use it. I personally found it really helpful when we visited the Scottish Parliament last year, and we've been to the Welsh Assembly. That's something that other English MPs like me just don't get the opportunity to do. So, more of that. I know we're the overall body, so it would be very handy if we took this on and did this sort of work, and we obviously are considering our own role and the resources that we've got, but have you been able to take, or do you have access to taking, some of this to the Scottish Parliament, to the Welsh Assembly and to Stormont, which will be up and running any day soon, we're all sure? So, have you been able to do that? Let's keep in touch. I think that's really valuable.

Deputy Declan Breathnach:

Thank you, Chair. I think it's appropriate that we should pay tribute to Ruth Taillon, Anthony's predecessor, and wish Anthony well in the running of the Centre for Cross Border Studies. My specific question relates to the uncertainty, particularly in relation to funding, and the impact of the vacuum on planning for certain commitments and the running of the Centre for Cross Border Studies. Indeed, in terms of the merits of planning for the future, how is that impacting on your organisation and, equally, the organisations in the border region that you mentioned, whether it's east border region, ICBAN or, indeed, the north-west? Is it a cause of concern in relation to the progress that has been made by all these organisations and community organisations in the past? I certainly detect that, in that vacuum, people are reluctant to plan in the absence of funding streams into the future.

Dr Anthony Soares:

Thank you very much. First of all, in terms of the opportunities for parliamentarians to visit the Scottish Parliament and our own thinking around this, I can inform you that we are planning to visit Holyrood and the National Assembly of Wales. We've asked a couple of

Committees to, perhaps, give us an opportunity to bring the new common charter to them, but I make a plea here to the members of this assembly: if you could assist us in that by engaging with the various legislatures across these islands we would be enormously grateful if you could assist us with that. I will say a couple of words about uncertainties around funding and the Centre for Cross Border Studies of which I am now the acting director, but I don't want to overshadow that with what we are doing here which is a new common charter.

We led that project, but the new common charter isn't ours. We didn't write it. It was the community organisations that wrote this common charter: it was their work; it's their thoughts; it's their beliefs; it's their values; it's what they aspire to; it's what they want and those organisations, yes, some of them are facing challenges around funding and uncertainty about what lies ahead.

But, reverting back to the Centre for Cross Border Studies briefly, there are two things I want to say: one is no matter what happens the Centre for Cross Border Studies will continue to work wholeheartedly to support, maintain and strengthen cross border and cross jurisdictional relations on the island of Ireland, and between the island of Ireland and Great Britain and further afield. We will do that no matter what for as long as we exist, but of course, yes, the funding situation is something that is a difficult one going forward.

Again, I want to revert back away from the centre and more generally, the common charter is asking precisely for that: that no matter what the context lying ahead of us politically, whatever the shape of relations between the UK and Europe, all of the administrations that are represented in this assembly must do everything they can to ensure that there are structures and funding streams there to support cross border and cross jurisdictional cooperation. So, no matter what the context, legislators must ensure that that happens, and we are here to assist, to inform and to exchange views with legislators around how that can happen.

Finally, we have been looking at funding structures, in particular, the UK Government's proposed UK shared prosperity fund. We had a couple of meetings with some of the officials responsible for designing that policy. I must say first of all that there is still little detail around what that is, but it was concerning to us that if this is the proposed replacement for EU structural funds, that particular policy seems to have forgotten that structural funds are crucial to supporting cross-border cooperation. It's not just about funding for the four nations, it's also to allow the nations themselves to cooperate across borders which includes Northern Ireland's co-operation with the Republic of Ireland, but also Wales with Ireland and Scotland with Northern Ireland and Ireland. So, that UK shared prosperity fund must take notice of that and support the building and maintaining of relations within and between these islands through ensuring that that funding stream supports that type of cooperation going forward.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

We have one final round of questions now before we have to move on. Viscount Bridgeman.

Viscount Bridgeman:

Thank you Co-Chairs. You mentioned that among the groups which comprise your negotiations there is the faith groups, and I'm just recalling an experience of mine in the House of Lords about two years ago when I burst into the wrong meeting room, and I found myself in the company of clerics of all denominations from Northern Ireland. I mentioned this to a Northern Irish friend of mine, and he effectively said, "Grow up, the churches have

kept in touch right through all the Troubles”. Now, there may be some colleagues here who tell me to “grow up” again, but I thought that was an encouraging basis for your work.

Vicky Ford:

Thank you, and it’s a really interesting idea and I agree, as someone who grew up near the border, how important it is that we are listening to local communities and how frustrating it is at the moment to see democracy stalled both in the UK as well as in Northern Ireland.

4.15 pm

It’s just a sort of point of principle as well, especially with the EU funding — and I have been an MEP for many years as well — that still needs to have democratic oversight. And so, whilst it’s great to have the local communities involved, there shouldn’t be an excuse for lack of — you know, need for the elected representatives to properly scrutinise, properly make decisions etc. That needs to be going on as well.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Juan Watterson.

The Hon Juan Watterson SHK:

Thank you, Chair. Firstly, on behalf of the Parliament of the Isle of Man, let me forgive you now and offer you absolution for cancelling your meeting on the Isle of Man, but I’m sure you’ll be welcome back. As we know, certainly physical meetings such as this do come at a financial premium. How do you follow that up via online communities, so carrying on the discussion once you’ve forged those initial contacts? Because I presume that that’s especially important in a rural setting as well, and keeping rural communities connected. And I suppose the final note to leave this on, and the final question, Chair, is where do we find out more?

Connétable Simon Crowcroft:

Thank you. Mr Soares, you were kind enough to mention the Crown dependencies in your talk, and I know that we are — perhaps Jersey and Guernsey are not perhaps at the uppermost of people’s minds when we look at the new Common Charter. But it did strike a chord with me, and certainly there are times when our two bailiwicks strike me a bit like Lilliput and Blefescu, if it’s appropriate to mention Jonathan Swift while we’re in his country. Eight hundred yards between those two islands, and Jersey and Guernsey are a bit further apart than that, but there is sometimes a frustrating lack of cooperation between the two islands. And I think this common charter could easily be adapted for the Channel Islands, and would perhaps be a good starting place for us to develop those kind of links, both at parliamentary and at grassroots levels. Thank you.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Okay. Thank you. And John Grogan.

John Grogan:

Yes. Very quickly, Chair, could you say a further word about sport and how that came up in the discussions? Do you think things like rugby, football, racing — it’s important that they’re free-to-air? For example, the rugby, the Six Nations — there’s a threat that that might be incorporated in World Rugby, the international competition. And if it’s not experienced by everyone, it’s half as good, I would argue.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Okay. If you'd like to respond, please? Thank you.

Dr Anthony Soares:

Thank you. Maybe I'll start with the last question first. Unfortunately, our discussions around sport didn't get down to the nitty-gritty of free-to-air, but yes, I would wholeheartedly agree with the fact that, in terms of experiencing sport, people should be given every opportunity to do that, and free-to-air would be important in that respect. But the discussions around sport didn't — the community groups involved across these islands, they noted that there is competition between the various parts of these islands — that we compete against each other and we're rivals, but we also unite in some — in terms of rugby, for example, cricket, hockey. Hockey, for example, is an all-Ireland body. There's no separation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in that term. So there are sporting institutions that span these islands, and we compete but we also come together and play together and, hopefully, watch sport as well. So it's very important.

In terms of the Channel Islands and the frustrating lack of cooperation — how this common charter could perhaps inspire the Channel Islands to greater cooperation. It's not just frustrating in terms of lack of cooperation between the Channel Islands. That frustration we experience occasionally, or sometimes more frequently, across these islands as well. Proximity sometimes does not mean that we actually cooperate, and that is a frustrating thing, sometimes because of the missed opportunities where, by coming together, we can perhaps save money in terms of two Administrations or the Administrations involved.

And in terms of democracy and the role of legislatures around funding, absolutely. I can have no disagreement there in terms of the oversight of legislatures. The only thing I would say is that that oversight role can only be improved with increased dialogue between legislatures across all of the jurisdictions to ensure that whatever is agreed makes sense across and takes up opportunities, and it also involves a dialogue with the communities that they represent. Thank you.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

OK, that's —. I'd like to thank all our speakers for addressing us here today, Gary and Anthony. Much appreciated. I think we all found the presentations fascinating. I believe that the challenges discussed are common to communities across many of our areas, and it's important that we ensure that the benefits of strong economies are felt right across all regions and benefit all citizens, despite the many challenges presented by the likes of Brexit or other external factors, so it was very worthwhile to be part of this discussion. And, as you said yourself in your own presentation, you're available to talk to some of the other jurisdictions if people want to talk to you. So, I'm gonna move on to the next session — *[Applause.]*

THAT THIS ASSEMBLY HAS CONSIDERED RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

The good news is that I'm informed that there's coffee and tea at the back of the hall, but before everyone disappears, I want to call on — we'll now commence our political debate on the following motion approved by the steering committee, and that is:

“this Assembly has considered recent political developments”.

And I call on Senator Feighan to move the motion, and, again, if people are going out for coffee, maybe you just come back in if you're feeling — I blame it on the tiramisu, Frankie, you know? People are feeling a bit sluggish now at this stage. Is it the tiramisu? It didn't affect you, no?

Senator Frank Feighan:

No. Tiramisu is for wimps. We're from the west.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

OK, you were tea and buns. OK.

Senator Frank Feighan:

Yes. I move the motion.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

OK. So, are you going to say anything on it? No? OK. Right. We've moved the motion. Speakers? Lord Kilclooney. Oh, Paul Murphy. Sorry. Sorry, Paul.

Lord Murphy of Torfaen:

It's quite all right. I'm often confused as other people these days.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I knew it was a Lord anyway.

Lord Murphy of Torfaen:

Delighted to be able to take part in this debate. Short as it might be, it's very important, obviously, for this Assembly. I'm not going to deal with Brexit, even though I think that the effect of a no-deal Brexit would be calamitous for both United Kingdom and Ireland, but rather to reflect on the fact that Brexit has meant that, during the last two years or so, there has been, in Northern Ireland, a very unfortunate drift and a huge omission, I think, on the part of the two Governments by not taking the opportunity they should've done to restore the institutions.

Now, someone mentioned a few hours ago about the importance of the Assembly and the Executive and indeed North/South institutions as an integral part of the Good Friday Agreement. I spent five years of my life negotiating both that agreement and later ones, and I do believe that the right to be governed in a democratic fashion, as a result of the referendum, in the whole of the island of Ireland, is hugely important, and that's why it's been so regrettable in the last two years that we've seen that drift, and I think that the two Governments have not been impressive in being able to stop it.

When I look at it, the wasted opportunities in, effectively, you can't negotiate something like this on a part-time basis, you can't have telephone diplomacy, which is what has happened over the last couple of years, and there's no point in throwing up your hands in the air and saying, "Oh, it can't be done because they don't agree". Well, if that had happened 21 years ago, we would never have had a Good Friday Agreement. Course they didn't agree, but, in the end, they did. And it's taken, inevitably, as we've heard over the last couple of weeks, the death of a journalist and the homily of a priest to bring us to our senses, and I do hope that happens. And so, although I am talking about the missed opportunity and the drift, I am now much more optimistic, and I think that the fact that there's a proper plan — a proper structure, which there should've been over the last couple of years, but it's there now, with the working groups and the issues they have to address, and the fact they're going to be chaired — these working groups — by civil servants is a really good start. My regret, though, is, at the moment, they don't appear to want an independent chair of the process, which I think would be a good idea, and also there should be Prime Ministerial involvement at a point when it's necessary, in a way that has not occurred over the last couple of years.

The reality is that, when both John Major from the Conservative Party and Tony Blair from the Labour Party and their Irish counterparts took part in those negotiations, it was a huge stimulus to the talks and to their eventual success. But having said all that, I wish both the Governments and the parties well in the next couple of weeks, or perhaps longer. I was asked yesterday on the radio by an interviewer what chance I will give, from a percentage point of view, of the success of these talks and I stuck my neck out and said 60% chance of success. I hope to God that is the case and that, next time when we meet, we will have an Assembly and an Executive and North/South bodies so that we can have what the people of Northern Ireland truly deserve.

Delyth Jewell AM:

Thank you, Co-Chair. I'm not going to focus on Brexit either, Members will probably be pleased to hear, but one thing I would say on that is that, regardless of what people think about Brexit, I think that most people will agree that the amount of attention that has been taken up with debates around it has meant that there has been so little attention given to other areas. In economics, people talk about opportunity cost and that however much — if a certain area of policy gets a lot of attention, that means that that same amount of attention is not given to other areas. So, when we've been talking this morning about climate, I think we get this sense of this — we get a glimpse into the abyss almost of all the areas that we have been neglecting because so much of our attention has been taken up with Brexit and, again, that is regardless of what people's opinions are on Brexit.

I'd like to put on the record officially that Wales was the first Parliament to declare a climate emergency because we were around an hour or so before Westminster and we were very pleased about that. *[Laughter.]* I just felt like I should put that on the record.

And it is an emergency. It's fantastic that Parliaments across the world are now beginning to recognise that. I think that there is a danger with issues to do with climate change that we will think about ice caps and polar bears and ideas that seemed very remote and, actually, as we've already been discussing at length today, it isn't a remote concept at all and we are already starting to see the effects. In the Oxford English Dictionary, the definition of an emergency says that it's something that requires an immediate response. So, it is something which, by its very definition, means that something has to happen in response to it. But the Latin root of the word "emergency" is "emergere" and that means to bring to light, so although there are many issues where Members from different legislatures here will have

areas of discord, things that we disagree on, then at least there can emerge here a sense of accord and a chorus we can work in concert together because we do need to address this in a pressing way.

My colleague Ann Jones this morning spoke eloquently about my predecessor Steffan Lewis, who was a Member of this Assembly and tragically passed away far too young earlier this year at 34 years old. Steffan, like me, was an internationalist and this Assembly and others like it were so important to him because of the fact that we can come together and find areas where we can move forward. And I am so pleased that we have been discussing climate change and I know that he would be delighted to hear that so much progress is being made. So, the fact of us declaring these emergencies means that we are beginning to acknowledge that it isn't just about polar bears, although that is important, it isn't just about ice caps, it is not a remote or far away issue; it's immediate, it's close at hand and we need to get to grips with it.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Frank, do you want to come in?

Senator Frank Feighan:

[Inaudible] I had to do the last time. Look, I suppose, recent political developments. A year ago, I was at the Goliath Trust ball in the Europa hotel, and, effectively, they were dealing with the persistent problem of educational underachievement in Northern Ireland's most disadvantaged areas.

4.30 pm

I should never be saying anything positive about Bertie Ahern but he did say one thing to Senator George Mitchell at that ball. He said to quit the messing, and you could see there was a sea change in the people that were there. These were people who were delivering education. They actually genuinely want to see Stormont sitting again.

Two weeks ago I was in St Anne's Cathedral, a year later, and you could see the spontaneous reaction. I do hope that both parties will get together and we'll have Stormont up and running again.

But Brexit — and I have to go back to Brexit — has caused huge hurt amongst the political establishment, and what we need to do now as politicians is to try to work together to repair those fences that, effectively, have been broken. I know Brexit isn't at an end yet but we need to work much, much harder, and that's, again, where this British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly comes in. I know, from talking to my colleagues, it has caused those divisions but it's our job to try to repair those fences that are broken.

Lord Bruce of Bennachie:

Following up on Paul Murphy, a few months ago, I was in an integrated school in Derry. I'm talking to the sixth form and the head teacher said, "Do you know, I think I'm only educating these children to leave Northern Ireland because the situation has deteriorated and people have retreated into the communities, and what we're trying to do here is being taken backwards."

And another teacher said to them, "How many of you think you could see violence returning to the streets of Northern Ireland?". Every single one of those children put their hand up to say they thought that was likely.

Now, that was a few months ago. I'd like to think that things are a little bit more positive but it took the death of a journalist for that to happen. As a liberal democrat — our Alliance colleague's not here at the moment — I not only, obviously, welcome the success of the Alliance in the local elections but I impart the party point: it does seem to me to indicate that there is a mood in Northern Ireland that says, "We can't just push everything to the extremes and expect them to sort it out. There has to be a pulling together at the centre as well."

There is an opportunity and a mood where there's a sort of sense of responsibility, which could easily evaporate. So, I think it's really important, therefore, that these talks do actually go somewhere. I rather agree that an independent facilitator would seem to me to be helpful but the important thing is that the talks make progress.

As an incidental point, though, I'm also on the Financial Affairs Committee in the House of Lords, or the sub-committee, and we had Lord Hall, the former British financial services commissioner, and he said to us, "Everything went wrong when Theresa May set red lines for Brexit and then acted as if she hadn't set them, and created a situation where there isn't actually a half-way house. You're either in the EU or you're out, and if the argument is we're out but accepting all the rules, you're left with a situation where you take all the rules and you have no vote and no influence."

I would suggest that the argument that we've just got to get a deal isn't cutting the mustard. The choice is actually between leaving the European Union properly, which is what the Brexit Party wants, or not leaving the European Union. This fudging around trying to find an agreement which there is no majority for in the House of Commons is taking us absolutely nowhere.

My final comment about that is it's making climate change, education, health, international relations all completely sour, not least because every Cabinet Minister thinks they're going to be the next Prime Minister and that's much more important than doing the day job. So, it's pretty dysfunctional and pretty dispiriting.

We do need to move on but I think people are being very unrealistic about UK politics if they think it's going to be resolved easily and quickly.

Deputy Joan Burton:

I also wanted to specifically mention the death of Lyra McKee in the context of this is the first meeting of the Assembly since her murder.

We have often discussed, particularly, I think, people from the island of Ireland, that there has been a genuine fear on the part of many of us that violence was something which possibly lay around the corner. Bearing that in mind, I absolutely acknowledge that there are many people here who strongly believe in Brexit, but I would say again that the impact of a bad Brexit on the island of Ireland is a real risk. It does empower people who still believe in guns and bullets and violence and bombs to step out of the shadows and to come forward and to put the kind of community cross-cooperation that we were discussing in the charter — to basically wreck all of that by, essentially, undermining the trust that has been built up and developed.

I think the other thing about the death of Lyra McKee is that it happened to a young gay woman in the context in which one of the issues which separates some of the parties in Northern Ireland is what's difficult for a lot of societies — and was difficult in the Republic of Ireland — which was to address the issue of gay rights and the equality of rights. So, I absolutely wish the parties that the talks are successful. But I do think we know, in each of

the different parts of Ireland and of the UK, that issues like gay rights are fundamentally important. I mean, in the case of the Dáil, the Dáil only dealt with decriminalisation after 1992. So, effectively, it's been a relatively short period, and I do think that progress can be made.

I would also say as well that it has drawn attention to the generation born after 1990. Again, going back to the previous discussion, it is quite astonishing how many people born after that period had absolutely no idea, in different parts of Ireland — I wouldn't say so much in the North, but certainly in the Republic — of what the violence actually meant and was like. In a sense, I think it's important that, maybe at a future date, we get an opportunity to see how is it possible to remind people of what has happened in all of our lifetimes in terms of dreadful atrocities on both sides. I mean, again, we've been going through a decade of commemorations in the Republic. We are now entering into and are in a very difficult period, if you like: the memories and recall of the War of Independence. We will be moving into the civil war which was, thankfully, very short-lived but was extremely bitter, and, in fact, sowed many of the political divisions and political shape of things that still apply.

So, I would say, particularly to colleagues from the UK, in the Republic, we feel mesmerised by Brexit. We watch it compulsively on television and listen to it on radio, possibly far more than lots of people in the UK, because I think lots of people in Ireland kind of enjoy their politics but also endure their politics at times. So, I do hope that in the discussions that are taking place in the UK, I really ask colleagues again — and I know they are very aware of the issues in relation to the island of Ireland — just to recall it and to recall that young woman with her life before her and her partner now bereft, and all for what? Politics that we can fix if we actually put our mind to it. I think it's good that we have this debate.

I'm in favour of the EU. The EU on the island of Ireland was massive in developing women's rights and a whole series of other rights, not least, for instance, for people with a disability. That was probably more true of the Republic than of Northern Ireland, which, in lots of ways, had a framework adopted from the mainland.

I would just say that we should use this opportunity to pause and think and see how can we get fixing it again, after all, the talks that were entered into and the Belfast Agreement entered into was in a much more difficult environment with far more violence to stop and cease. And I think it shouldn't be beyond all our collective capacity as politicians to try and help with that process again.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Nigel Mills. No. OK. Jeffrey.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson:

Thank you Co-Chair and I echo the comments that have been made about the tragic death of Lyra McKee. I'd the pleasure of being interviewed by Lyra on a number of occasions, one in particular were she was researching a book about the death of Robert Bradford, who was unionist MP, and I'm sure neither of us every thought that we would be at a time when she would become a victim in the same way. And as I was on the doorsteps during the local elections in Northern Ireland there was a very clear message coming across from the people that I met in my own constituency and that was that they really want Stormont back up and running again; they want to see the political institutions functioning and I think the results of the election, to a degree, reflected that desire. And actually I see that as a really positive development that despite the fact of two years of nothing, no activity in the institutions, and

the difficulties there've been and the polarisation that some have referred to that has taken place in that period, there is still a desire, a strong desire, for those institutions to operate and the people have not turned their back on the prospect of getting a government up and running again, so, I'm encouraged by that.

I think that we in the talks — I mean my party is absolutely committed to getting to a point as quickly as we can where we restore the devolved institutions and of course, the North-South Ministerial Council and the east-west arrangements, but we do recognise that in doing so there is a need to reform the way that the institutions operate. I don't believe that those institutions were ever intended to be set in stone, that they could not be improved upon and I think there is a need to improve upon them, not least in regard to how the Assembly and Executive operates, notwithstanding the need still to have the safeguards in place that were established under the agreements. So, we are committed to moving this forward.

On the North/South side of things, and I said this yesterday at an engagement I had in Dublin, there is a real need for, I think, for greater engagement. We do not handle separation very well on this island and our history shows us that, that when one group or the other takes a decision which the other group doesn't like, it has the potential to separate, we don't handle it well. We tend to retreat into our own sense of identity and purpose and really we need to be doing the opposite in my opinion. We need to be engaging more now than ever because there is no need whatsoever for Brexit to inevitably result in a fracture in relationships on this island and between these islands. That doesn't have to happen because in the end the agreements were designed around the relationships between the peoples and actually they moved the debate beyond one of territory to one of those human relationships. So, Brexit will be what we make of it; it's impact will be what we make of it and I can only say for my part, that I'm determined it won't fracture those relationships and that the progress that's been made in recent years will not go back, it will not regress.

That will only happen if we do nothing about it; if we wring our hands and say what a terrible thing it is but don't actually take the steps that we need to take to see that greater engagement.

4.45 pm

So, there's a challenge for us, Co-Chair, in that in this forum and in other fora as well to see how we can enhance the level of engagement. I find that every time I visit Dublin and other parts of the Republic that I learn things and people also learn things from those engagements — those meetings — and I think that's really important. It sounds very simple and basic, but it's actually vital that we continue to have this engagement; that we do not retreat because it all seems too difficult.

The third point I want to mention is legacy. For as long as we do not deal with the legacy of our troubled past, we hold back the day when we get to the ultimate objective of the peace process, which is reconciliation. We're not there; we are not there. Whilst individuals in our societies perhaps have experienced it, collectively we're nowhere near it. Part of that is because we have not dealt with the legacy of our Troubles, and they continue to cast their shadow over us, and it is a shadow that impacts on the political debate, and especially within Northern Ireland itself. I'm my party's legacy spokesperson and therefore I'm involved in that debate, and I aim these remarks at myself as well as everyone else.

We need to get agreement on this legacy process, because Joan referred to the next few years — the remainder of the decade of centenaries. This is challenging territory for us. I chaired the World War 1 centenary committee in Northern Ireland, and we worked closely with

Dublin, and the result of our joint endeavours was that we managed to navigate our way through some very difficult centenaries during the World War I centenary period, not least 1916; the Somme and the Easter Rising. But there are some really difficult ones coming down the track at us.

In parallel with that, we're gonna have this legacy process, which will last a minimum of five years. If we agree to it this year and it takes another six months to get the legislation through to put the legacy arrangements in place, you can see that we're going to have five years of really difficult discussion and debate alongside the scenario that Joan painted of dealing with these very difficult centenaries as well.

Again, it doesn't have to be inevitable, Co-Chair, that the outcome of all of that is negative, because we can actually take — we can use that to help us take the steps that are required to move towards the ultimate objective, which is reconciliation. But it is going to require a joined-up approach, and we do need to move beyond — beyond — retribution, beyond the point where we are, in some cases and maybe on both sides, trying to rewrite the narrative of the Troubles, and we need to get to a place where we agree that there were things that went wrong, should never have happened and we move on. Not that we forget the past, because the victims are there, but that we have to move this beyond where we are now.

Co-Chair, in conclusion, we've got a difficult period ahead of us, and I haven't even mentioned Brexit. So, there are real challenges here, but the first and vital step we must take is to restore the institutions. The last two years and the debate around Brexit — the biggest deficit in that debate has been the fact that Belfast and Dublin are not talking to each other through the medium of the North/South Ministerial Council. We may not have had the problems we have now — and that's an "if", a "maybe" — if we had had that level of engagement and found a way of reaching an accommodation that would've avoided the difficulties we are now in. But we are where we are, and I am simply saying, Co-Chair, that we have a lot more difficulties and challenges coming down the track.

And if we continue the way we're going, and we're not talking to each other as much as we should do, then these next five years will be very difficult for those relationships.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Thank you for that intervention. Karin.

Karin Smyth:

Thank you. It's a pleasure to follow on from that intervention.

To bring us back to Brexit though, I'm afraid, Joan, I absolutely hear what you say, both from friends and family who live in Ireland who are incredibly knowledgeable, but my own friends and family at home are also following this. My advice is to get off the Internet and not watch it so much because it's all anxiety-inducing, but they continue to do that. Brexit isn't an event for the United Kingdom, and, Frank, I'm afraid it isn't going to end when something's agreed. Brexit is a long-term process now for the United Kingdom. It is a challenge to the United Kingdom. I think it strains very much the settlement, over hundreds of years, and the recent devolution settlements across the piece, particularly with reference to Scotland and Wales.

My own very strong view is that we shouldn't be leaving. I'm very disappointed to leave for many of the reasons that are well articulated, but, you know, that is not necessarily where we are and the country remains very divided. Very divided. For my own part, as an English MP,

the settlement as it refers to England currently is such that my constituents have no democratic control over their health service. They have no democratic local control over their education service. Our transport democratic accountability is now merged within city and regional sort of ad hoc arrangements and quangos, etc. So the collective sort of nationalist voice for England is really struggling to be heard through the democratic structures that we currently have, and, that, in large part, drives what we've seen around Brexit. I have spoken in the House of Commons about this, and I upset all my friends in the SNP, but I'm not a nationalist of any type. I think nationalism is very divisive wherever it occurs, but the nationalism that is expressing itself in England around Brexit is not just around the European Union — and I sit alongside colleagues here who are very strongly anti the European Union — but there is a voice there that needs to be answered as to how people in England have some sort of direct influence over the basic services and parts of their lives, and we've not even started to address that issue yet.

So, I'm afraid, Brexit will not end in three weeks or six months: it is a long-term process for us now and something that I think — I've have certainly said this in my own party — we're not addressing, and we need to start addressing it very, very quickly. Until we start doing that, we will not really be able to move on very quickly. That of course has implications then for all the other areas that people have raised, but, again — and you hear it constantly, particularly — I understand how difficult this is for colleagues in Ireland — but everything is now moving across the islands with regard to those democratic structures, and I think it is for those of us who understand each other's nations and the constituent parts to continue to try and work together to understand, listen and learn, and for those, particularly, young people, we don't want to take them back to the past. There is a danger in talking about those past events, and so on, like we did when we were young. We are all very old. I have three teenagers. Every time I take them across the border, I say, "Look here. This is where it used to be. There used to be this, that and the other here", and they're not remotely interested. They're interested in how the Internet works and the fact that, you know, occasionally, the Wi-Fi drops when you're going in and out of places. So we have to address the future recognising that everything is moving, but we have to be optimistic.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Paul Coghlan.

Senator Paul Coghlan:

Thank you, Co-Chair. It was good to hear our colleague Jeffrey being so positive. That gives us great hope that we'll have Stormont back in being hopefully not too far away; get the institutions back in business and an Executive back in place in Stormont, because that, I think, will automatically enhance and improve North/South relations, which are badly wanting, obviously.

On the Brexit question, as my colleague Frank said earlier, it's a start. There's no doubt Brexit uncertainty is indeed causing great upset, and, as a number of us, I think, see it at the moment, a large body of Conservative MPs seem unwilling to accept any form of customs union or regulatory alignment, and, again, a large body of Labour MPs seem to not accept anything to be agreed unless there's a further referendum on that. If that is so, what's gonna happen? Will it lead to further indicative votes in the Commons, or, if it's not a position, does it mean that we might carry on through the summer and there'll be a further extension of the October 31st deadline? I'd be interested in hearing our colleagues from both sides of the Commons on that question.

Mrs May, it seems, won't do anything to upset, I think, that large body of MPs, but the difficulty is that — as I think we accept on this island, as Jeffrey has been hinting there — you know, we have to put the national interest over our common party interests at times, and I would think this is very much so the position for Britain. But who are we to say? It's not our business to advise across the water.

Returning to a point Joan mentioned, there is no doubt that, on this island of Ireland, there is a small body of dangerous men, and maybe women, who, as long as there's uncertainty — and I mean, we had them parading in Dublin recently, in semi-military attire. We don't have the laws to arrest them if they are not carrying arms and so on. But that shows the importance of the Good Friday Agreement in all of this and protecting it in all its parts, as you have said, because God forbid that these people, if they were given any encouragement whatsoever by the indefiniteness that's there, would return to the British mainland again with some frightful, awful atrocity.

So, as had been said, there is a difficult period ahead, but I'm not as worried about the commemorations, we won't be celebrating any of that, our past, that's our history, but I think that Maurice Manning and Martin Mansergh put in place a very good set of guidelines — Joan, didn't they? — for government, for all of us, and, as has been done so far, I think we'll handle those sensibly. Thank you.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

I am just conscious that we have six more speakers. I presume people will want to change. The bus is going at six. So I'm not cutting anyone off, you know? But I'm just letting people be conscious of that. The next speaker is Alf Dubs.

Lord Dubs:

Thank you, Co-Chair, I'll try and keep it as brief as possible. I very much agree with what Paul Murphy said. It was a privilege to serve with him as Ministers in Northern Ireland under Mo Mowlam in the period up to the Good Friday Agreement and then the Act of devolution. I thought, at the time, one of the characteristics was that Ireland, Dublin, the Irish Government and the Irish people had an enormous sense of self-confidence which was lacking in the North completely, and we've now found that the UK seems to lack self-confidence as well, so the only confident people are you, the Irish,. I just mention that because it bedevils the political approach.

Joan spoke about the death of Lyra McKee. I think that sent shockwaves. I thought that the priest — and I'm a humanist — was in danger of giving the Catholic Church a good name by the way he spoke and, by the way, influenced things. But shouldn't we, as politicians, reflect on the fact that it takes the death, the tragic murder, of a young woman and the outspoken nature of a Catholic priest in the funeral to make people wake up when we, as politicians, couldn't make people wake up or the system wake up. We should reflect on that, as politics actually failed and it took this tragic murder to bring people, possibly, to their senses, although there was at least one politician from Northern Ireland who immediately said, "It won't make any difference". All I would say is shame on him. I won't mention his name. He's not here, but shame on him.

5.00 pm

Could I just make two comments? Some years ago, Committee D did a study of the disadvantage — of the life chances for young people in the most disadvantaged parts of Belfast. It was quite an eye-opener. And what we saw was the young people, certainly in

north Belfast, in west Belfast, who hadn't gained anything from the peace process, who were isolated, who were marginalised and who were very susceptible to the men of violence. And we sent that report in, nobody took any notice of it, and I thought to myself: "That's still a problem". Although we talk about the peace process having been wonderful, which it was, there are people in Northern Ireland, young people, who see no benefit for themselves or their lives in that. If I was the Member of the Assembly and was going back to power — it is not for us to lecture you — I would put that high on my agenda, saying, "How we can we allow young people to feel so isolated and disadvantaged?"

And, finally, can I say this? I forget who mentioned integrated education, but I think one of the bright spots in Northern Ireland is integrated education. I have been to integrated schools, I am a passionate supporter of them and I have talked to students, former students, whether they've moved to Britain or whether they have stayed at home, and they are some of the most enlightened, far-seeing people that there are in Northern Ireland. I just think we ought to look hard at the benefits of integrated education, what an enormous boost they've been and what a progressive force they are. I honestly believe that the majority of Northern Ireland parents would like to have a choice. I think if more Northern Ireland young people went to integrated schools, Northern Ireland would move to a better place. I hope when the Assembly is restored, and I hope it's quick, that those of you who are Members of it will look at the disadvantage facing young people in parts of Northern Ireland and also at the benefits of integrated education.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Thank you. Niall Ó Donnghaile and then Fergus O'Dowd.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile:

Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirleach. Thank you, Chair. A number of points there to cover, but just to start by echoing the words in relation to Lyra and the murder in Derry. I shared a panel with Lyra McKee a few years ago in west Belfast — actually, at an event in probably, I think, the most disadvantaged community in western Europe, with young people specifically. And while the purpose of it was for them to us those of us on the panel questions, Lyra McKee spent most of her time asking the young people in the audience questions. I just found her a very refreshing, invigorating young woman, and it's obviously a very tragic situation that compels us to do more.

There's a number of points I want to just cover as quickly as I can, Chair. In relation to the current political situation at home in the North, I noted and I listened very carefully to Lord Murphy's words and, given his experience, I put a great deal of merit in them. But if colleagues want to know the outstanding issues that pertain there, then I would advise them to just go back and read Martin McGuinness's resignation letter, because all of the outstanding issues around respect, around tolerance, around good and clean governance are all still to be resolved. I do think we can resolve them and one of the things that Jeffrey Donaldson said when he spoke, and I took note of it, is that we need to take steps. I agree with that. We all need to collectively takes steps, not just the parties but the two Government as well.

In terms of the motion here in front of us, I actually think, Chair, it could've and should've been stronger. We've all advocated here today for this body to do more. There should be no fear or no concern about this collective expressing our desire to wish the talks success, to want to see institutions return that are rights-compliant, that are based and grounded in the Good Friday Agreement, and I think that would've sent a very clear message from us today.

On the issue of Brexit, because of the motion, I actually looked up the definition of development. It says:

“a new and advanced product or idea”.

I would respectfully suggest that Brexit is neither, particularly for those of us in the North who voted against it. I noted colleagues talking about having no democratic control over certain things. We have had no democratic control over our own democratic franchise and expression in the North, given that we voted to remain and are being taken out of the EU against our will, undermining and jeopardising very core components of the Good Friday Agreement as a result. I think that’s something colleagues here around this table and, indeed, when they return to their own bodies, when they come to laud the Good Friday Agreement at meetings like this, need to reflect upon the live and imminent danger and threat and jeopardy posed to the Good Friday Agreement as a result of Brexit.

One the losses as a result of that will be the loss of democratic franchise and representation at the EU for Irish citizens in the North and indeed British citizens; and I am deeply disappointed at the Irish Government not taking the decision to use the two additional seats, should it come to pass, that the state here will receive for a constituency in the North.

Finally — Chair, you will be glad to hear — one colleague, my colleague from the Liberal Democrats, mentioned the growth of the centre ground going by the last local government election, just last week. I would contest again — respectfully, as someone not from the unionist tradition or community — that actually what you are seeing there is a shift within the unionist community from those who do not reflect, and have not reflected, modernity, progress and tolerance, to people who are for LGBTQ rights and language diversity, and who are pro-Remain in the EU. They are perhaps finding a new home in that party, as was referenced.

I have a whole section here on legacy, but I appreciate that we are under time constraints. Just to conclude, I think, going forward, that appreciating the sensitivities of a live negotiation process — and I was at Stormont House on Friday — I do not think we should be afraid whether our utterances, or indeed in agreed motions here, to assert ourselves and call for and support talks that get us back into institutions that are clean and deliver for everybody. Go raibh maith agat.

Deputy Fergus O’Dowd:

Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh. I would just like to say that I would like to reflect the views of Karin and Lord Dubs in terms of education in the future. I listened to Joan there, and in many cases we spend too much time looking at our history books. It is time to close them — not to forget what is in them — but to move on and have a vision for change and the future. I was speaking to Jeffrey about this yesterday, and I think educating together, in whatever way you can do it constructively, without discommoding any group or any religious organisation or focus, that bringing young people together is the future.

I have been coming off and on to these things, these meetings, for about 20 years and the only thing that has changed, obviously, is that I have got a little bit older. But I am a grandparent now and I’m looking at my grandchildren, and I’m saying, “Hey, what’s the future for you in Ireland, should you live there? Do you want more of the same, or do you want to change?” So I think we did this before at one stage; where we brought in young people from Northern Ireland to address us, and ask them to give us their vision for the future. That would be hugely important to give us new ideas, blood and thinking. That will educate us and hopefully help to bring about change. I don’t say this disrespectfully to anybody or any party

but, when I do visit Belfast, in a lot of places I see murals, murals of the past, and I know they represent important figures in the histories of both communities and obviously people who are very dear to them and their political philosophy. But I think we need to see murals for the future, a vision for the future.

Looking at it from the outside, in the South — obviously, I do not live in the North — and I am very much aware of the problems that Brexit is going to accentuate and make much worse. I just say, “Look, for God sake guys, get on with it.” You know? All those lives that were lost over the period of the Troubles on all sides. Right, we had the Good Friday Agreement; we had a working Executive in the North; and if Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness could work together, surely the leaders now can do too. Because they would have found it more difficult, I would say, initially, than anybody would have.

So there is just a sense in me of frustration, of not just getting on with the business. Look to the future and have a vision. I do not know how you could bring that about here for our next meeting, but I think we should focus on young people. That is my view.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

OK. Maybe that is something that the Steering Committee could take up. Lord Kilclooney next, and then Martin Vickers.

Lord Kilclooney:

I will be very brief. This has been a great discussion, and I was sorry that we really did not really have a bigger debate on Brexit on our programme this week.

Brexit is going to be very damaging to parts of Northern Ireland and, certainly to parts of the Republic of Ireland; and we should have been discussing the impact of Brexit and how Northern Ireland and the Republic could help each other to meet this challenge.

One the losses as a result of that will be the loss of democratic franchise and representation at the EU for Irish citizens in the North and indeed British citizens; and I am deeply disappointed at the Irish Government not taking the decision to use the two additional seats, should it come to pass, that the state here will receive for a constituency in the North.

Finally — Chair, you will be glad to hear — one colleague, my colleague from the Liberal Democrats, mentioned the growth of the centre ground going by the last local government election, just last week. I would contest again — respectfully, as someone not from the unionist tradition or community — that actually what you are seeing there is a shift within the unionist community from those who do not reflect, and have not reflected, modernity, progress and tolerance, to people who are for LGBTQ rights and language diversity, and who are pro-Remain in the EU. They are perhaps finding a new home in that party, as was referenced.

I have a whole section here on legacy, but I appreciate that we are under time constraints. Just to conclude, I think, going forward, that appreciating the sensitivities of a live negotiation process — and I was at Stormont House on Friday — I do not think we should be afraid whether our utterances, or indeed in agreed motions here, to assert ourselves and call for and support talks that get us back into institutions that are clean and deliver for everybody.

We have big problems ahead. I’m not too sure, as an onlooker, that the Republic recognises the challenges it’ll face, and I think it would’ve been helpful to have an open discussion about this challenge.

On the issue of Stormont and the restoration of the institutions, I was one of those who negotiated the Belfast Agreement with Lord Murphy and others, and I have always placed on record our appreciation of the work of Lord Murphy in that respect. He was a key player — let's not pretend otherwise. It was good to hear Jeffrey Donaldson confirming enthusiastically that the DUP wants to see the institutions restored at Stormont as soon as possible. I think what one has to realise, and when I come to the Republic of Ireland, I always recognise, how stable and democratic the institutions are here compared with what they are in Northern Ireland. I'm sorry to have to say that, obviously. But, in Northern Ireland, politics are like a patchwork quilt. It's not general right across the Province; it varies from one little district to another. Lord Murphy said that politics had moved and mentioned that the Alliance Party had done well. Well, 8,000 people voted last week in the Creggan area where the journalist was killed, and the Alliance Party got 122 votes. The DUP even beat them — it got 156 votes. So, it is a patchwork quilt.

I think the worst thing I heard during this discussion was from Lord Bruce when he said that he addressed pupils at an integrated school in Londonderry and asked the young people if they thought violence would return, and every single one, he said, raised their hand and said that violence would return. That emphasises my point that Northern Ireland is a patchwork quilt.

Our own ambassador here today praised the people of Creggan for moving on. They didn't move on. The embassy doesn't even know the facts. Look at the facts last week in the Creggan in the local elections. Who topped the poll? It wasn't the SDLP. It wasn't even Sinn Féin. It was the more extreme dissident republican. A dissident republican topped the poll in Creggan, where the journalist Lyra McKee had been killed only 10 days earlier. That emphasises my point that Northern Ireland is a patchwork quilt. In some places, the Alliance did move on. In Londonderry, the SDLP moved on; it beat Sinn Féin, gained seats. This is progress, yes, but don't forget that in the Creggan and certain other areas of Northern Ireland — unionist as well as republican — there are extremists who are still popular and are a danger to peace and stability in that province.

Martin Vickers:

Thank you, Co-Chair. I decided to contribute to this debate after Karin's contribution.

Karin Smyth:

[Inaudible.] terrified.

Martin Vickers:

It's interesting that, as she said in her comments, that she's a passionate supporter of the EU. I've always been opposed to the UK's membership. Karin highlighted the loss of control that people feel over their lives, and she highlighted more localised issues that we now have these quangos and unelected bodies controlling so much of our public services — health, transport and the like — and that contributes further to the feeling amongst people that they are, indeed, losing control. And that, of course, was what the slogan was at the time of the referendum three years ago. It was similar to the arguments that we had at the 1975 referendum. At that time, we called it "sovereignty", and that has become "control". I voted to leave in 1975. If only the country had followed suit. Think of all the problems it would've resolved that we're now having.

I think it's necessary to recognise that people in a constituency like mine — and 70% of them voted to leave — they did so because in part it was an emotional response: our history, our

culture and so on has evolved differently to mainland Europe and they felt they were having to make too many changes. I think it's fair to say that we've always been a semi-detached member of the EU, and I think that is obvious from the fact that so often our leaders, be they Labour or Conservative, have had to come back from European Councils and say, "Oh, don't worry, the Europeans are proposing this but we'll get an opt out, or we'll get a rebate, or use our veto", and so that inevitably convinces people even more that perhaps we're not really part of the club, that we would be better off on our own. I think it's not a move away from taking part in European affairs or world affairs or that we're going to deregulate and be an offshore Singapore: that's not the case. The UK will still want to take its full part in the world and it will do so through organisations such as the UN, the Commonwealth and the like.

5.15 pm

I think you've got to recognise that there is a silent majority. There are 400 or 500 people who regularly contact me about the EU and they use words like "traitor" and "betrayal" and so on. But as I often say to the staff in my office, "That's the 500 who are contacting us. There are 72,000 other people that I represent, and it was very evident during the recent local elections, knocking on doors, that people are taking a balanced view of this. Yes, there are those who, as I say, feel particularly passionate. The people I was talking to, yes, they want to leave and they want to be very clear, and there is anger and frustration building up that it is taking so long, but they don't in any way want to isolate themselves from the world. Of course they want their children to go to university and be involved in student exchanges and the like. They want their children to work in other parts of the world. My own daughter is a teacher in China. So, the idea that we want to close in, yes, that's the argument of a handful of people but they are small ones. We want to contribute, we want to take part, not only in the affairs of the UK and the islands that we represent here today, but in the world at large. So, please let us try and move forward to a position where we can show some flexibility and resolve this. It is a fact that the UK will inevitably have a new Prime Minister in the not too distant future, but we cannot use that as an opportunity to go back to square one. As I say, the anger and the frustration is building up. We've got to bring it to a conclusion.

Finally, please don't think that a second or third or fourth referendum or whatever will resolve this. Such is the frustration amongst many parts of the electorate that they wouldn't actually take part in a second referendum. The idea that if you got a different decision on a lower turnout that that would put the issue to sleep and people would be content is a complete myth. The decision has been taken, and if there were to be any vote it could only be on which sort of agreement we accept. I don't particularly like the Prime Minister's agreement. I made that clear by voting against it at the first attempt, but I recognise that it was the only way that we were going to deliver Brexit in a relatively short time and in a moderately acceptable way. Subsequently, I have supported it, reluctantly, but nevertheless I feel it does represent a compromise that the country on the whole would be prepared to accept.

So, please recognise the fact that this is the will of the vast majority of the British people, and we've got to accept it and work together to deliver it. Thank you.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Thank you. Reg.

Lord Empey:

Chair, the first point about Lyra McKee — just a little anecdote. I didn't personally know her, although many of my colleagues did. But two years ago she asked one of our staff to arrange for her to visit a County Armagh Orange family to see how they celebrated the 12th of July.

Now, even though Lyra would've come from a totally different background, I think it illustrated the fact — and she's written a book about an Ulster Unionist MP who was shot dead, Reverend Robert Bradford. So I think it illustrated that she was a young woman who was prepared to look beyond the narrow confines of her particular background, but was prepared to look at a wider picture, and I think that's — when I heard the story, I was quite astounded that she'd actually gone to those lengths to have that done.

With regard to Brexit, I do have to say to Malcolm Bruce it's not a clear-cut in or out for us. Leaving without a deal is bad for Northern Ireland, with a capital B. We need a deal, and sadly the Government in London has negotiated terribly badly, in my opinion. But it just doesn't suit us, however simple it might be. Our system will not work. We need to leave in an orderly fashion, and we can't leave, in my opinion, with no deal. It just doesn't work for us.

Finally, Jeffrey mentioned legacy issues, as have others. It's a very contentious issue. The Government's proposals — I don't agree with them. Never have. And I just cannot see how, if the structures are anything like them that have been proposed are eventually established — five years wouldn't look at it. It would be at least double that, if not more. And I just don't personally feel that the proposals that are on the table at the moment will bring the sort of hope and closure to many people that we would all love to see, so I think that remains unfinished business.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Thank you, Reg. Vicky?

Vicky Ford:

Thank you.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Robin is the last speaker.

Vicky Ford:

I wasn't going to talk, but I felt I wanted to say a few messages. First of all, I represent a part of the UK which is a long way away from the Irish border, in Essex, in Chelmsford, which is a constituency that voted — just like the rest of the country, we voted 51:49. Very split, very divided, and still is very split and very divided. But the death of Lyra McKee really had passion from my own constituency, even though they're a long way away, that this was clearly a young woman who had a huge amount of talent, had already made a huge difference in the world, and was such a waste. And that feeling then — 'We need to find a way forward' — was felt very much in my own constituency, so I wanted to send that message.

I grew up in Omagh, and I wanted to pick up the point about schools and bringing young people together. There's a brilliant new campus planned in Omagh, which was to bring all the schools, Catholic and Protestant, onto the same campus so that all the young people would have sports together — they'd get together. And the campus was to be on the old Army barracks, and the whole project has stalled now, year after year, because of the lack of decision-making. And this is back to the need to get the decision-making again. It's great to have community conversations, but we must get the decision-making again.

I did eight years in the European Parliament, and I know that the devil is in the detail in all of these things. And I really would urge everyone from especially the South, as well as us over

in Westminster, to look at the detailed reasons why some people have felt so uncomfortable with the backstop. Some of the details about who will be making decisions on the committees if we do need to have common regulations — who owns those decisions? Because those sorts of details are really, really important, and I hope that that is a way that we might then try and move forward, because we urgently do need to move forward, and otherwise I fear for the trust in democracies wider across the UK, as well as over here. Thank you.

Viscount Bridgeman:

Thank you, Chairman. Very briefly on a general point, at the start of the Brexit negotiations — I hope I speak for all the delegates from outside Ireland — the one country which we would not have wished to see disadvantaged, of the 27, was Ireland.

And we now have the nightmare situation where exactly that is about — likely to happen. Of all the countries, Ireland is going to be very disadvantaged.

What is the message from this? I think it is that this forum — this Assembly — which achieved so much in frankness and constructive dialogue, has an absolutely vital role in the times ahead.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

OK, thank you very, very much. I think this debate is gonna go on later on anyway. I'm informed —. Seriously, you know, I think people — this is only the beginning of a conversation. I think people spoke with so much passion here today on a vast range of issues, but I think we — you know, Niall made the point about the talks, and I think we all agree that, you know, we don't need a motion to be passed here in relation to talks. I think there's goodwill on all sides in relation to those talks, and we all hope and pray that those talks are successful.

There's been mention of Lyra McKee and the unfortunate death of that young woman, and I remember watching one of the — she was on this TED talk and she was talking about the difficulties she had as a gay woman and meeting with a Muslim imam, and she was saying the impact that, you know, the fact that she engaged in dialogue and, you know, to change people's minds — and she was talking about her own mind as well as others — was the only way forward was actually to talk to people. And I suppose that's what we're doing here today, so maybe, on that note — *[Inaudible.]*

Adjourned at 5.27 pm.

Tuesday 14 May 2019

The Assembly met at 9.41 am.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Good morning, everyone. There are a lot of fresh faces out there. This is a historic first: we have a quorum at half nine on a Tuesday, so that is really good. The meeting is now in public session.

Welcome to you all as we begin our second day of deliberations. I trust you had a rest after yesterday's dinner at Powerscourt Estate. I look forward to the remainder of our Assembly and further stimulating engagement.

This morning, we will deal with some of the Assembly business. We will consider the annual report 2018, postponed from yesterday. We will also hear updates from our Committee Chairs, and, following the approval by the Steering Committee, Committee B will present its report to the Assembly this morning. We will then hear from representatives of the National Youth Council in Ireland, who will update the Assembly on their work and the sustainable development goals and take questions from Members.

BIPA ANNUAL REPORT 2018

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

We start with the annual report 2018. The Steering Committee has agreed the draft annual report 2018, copies of which were circulated electronically to all Members. I ask that the plenary session take note of the 23rd annual report 2018. Is that agreed?

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEE REPORTS, ETC

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

We move on to updates from the various Committees. We will hear from the Chairs of Committees A, C and D. Committee B will then provide updates to the Assembly and present their report, "Second Interim Report on European Security Cooperation after Brexit: Port Security and Infrastructure".

COMMITTEE A - SOVEREIGN MATTERS

Senator Frank Feighan:

First of all, I thank my colleague Peter Fitzpatrick for the work that he has done as Co-Chair of Committee A.

After a short period of abeyance, Committee A will begin work on a new inquiry, examining illicit trade on the UK/Irish border. The inquiry, as you know, will build on previous work carried out by the Committee but will take into account the potential impact of Brexit in this sphere. Four rapporteurs have been appointed to undertake fact-finding for this inquiry: Nigel Mills MP, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP, Senator Paul Coghlan and Declan Breathnach TD. It is proposed that members of the Committee will meet organisations such as HMRC, the revenue commissioners, law enforcement task forces from both sides of the border as well as business, farming and academic stakeholders over the course of its duty. The first series of meetings will be held in the weeks ahead in Dublin, Dundalk, Crossmaglen and Belfast, with our interim report presented at the next BIPA plenary in Warwickshire.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much, Frank. Are there any comments from the Members of the Assembly? No. We will move on swiftly to Committee C.

9.45 am

PROGRESS REPORT FROM COMMITTEE C (ECONOMIC)

Deputy Joan Burton:

The Committee has welcomed a new member, Delyth Jewell, from Wales. We're happy to welcome her to the Committee.

Since the last plenary session, the Committee has visited Stockton-on-Tees, Newcastle upon Tyne, Dublin, Newcastle, County Down, and Belfast to learn best-practice approaches from case studies across the islands as part of its inquiry into the revitalisation of the high street and local businesses.

We've had a lot of people from different towns, including people on councils, people who are traders and business people right across the islands, come and talk to the Committee about how they would see their town or their high street area, the central area, being revitalised.

The Committee has agreed a heads of the report for the inquiry into the revitalisation of the high street and local business. At the Committee meeting at the start of this conference, the Committee members discussed the issues of parking, vacant retail units, initiatives to encourage community involvement and ensuring that revitalisation includes all demographic groups, particularly — Delyth, in fact, raised this issue — loneliness that particularly older people can suffer from, and whether or not we can configure the high streets in ways that will make them friendlier for people.

The Committee expects to bring a report on the topic to the autumn plenary in Warwickshire, in the Forest of Arden — "*As You Like It*" — and the Committee discussed proposals for a future inquiry, which will be launched following the autumn plenary.

We've been discussing together the topical issues, such as the challenges facing coastal towns, the green economy, gender separation in employment, and why, in so many employments, women earn far less than men and have far less favourable conditions of employment and security of employment.

The Co-Clerks are now going to scope the proposals in advance of a final decision, which, I hope, we'll take at the autumn meeting.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Are there any questions to Joan?

OK. So I now call the Chair of Committee D, Lord Alf Dubs.

PROGRESS REPORT FROM COMMITTEE D (ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL)

Lord Dubs:

May I deal with what we're going to do next before I deal with where we are with the present investigation? The Committee met on Sunday and we agreed that our next topic would be indigenous minority languages in the BIPA jurisdictions, and we will be proceeding with that shortly.

Can I explain where we are on the study, which was the cross-jurisdiction implications of abortion policy? We started out quite a long time ago before we even knew that there was going to be a referendum in Ireland, and we took evidence in Liverpool and London. Then came the news of the referendum, and we were advised not to take evidence during the period of the referendum, either in Belfast or in Dublin, because that might interfere with, or might be seen to be interfering in, the process of the referendum, so we did nothing for a time. We then, last October, took evidence in Belfast, and then, in January, we took evidence in Dublin.

We had a draft report before the Committee yesterday, but you won't be surprised, colleagues, to know that the Committee was not in full agreement. In fact, we had a very strong dissenting voice, and we discussed for some time what to do about that. We felt, in the end — and this is what I put to the Steering Committee on Sunday after our Committee meeting — that maybe the best way forward would be for us to have a minority report. We'd have the main report and then we'd have a minority report so that the minority view would also be reflected in the document we put out.

That was agreed by the Steering Committee, and that is — I suppose, subject to this plenary — how we advise that we should go forward. That means that the minority will have a chance in an addendum or appendix to the report to state what their position is. I'm told, though, a minority report would quite removed, quite some way away from the main report. There'd be some quite significant differences of opinion. So, I think we can accommodate that and I think that's probably the best way forward, otherwise we can't agree at all, and that doesn't normally happen. On the other hand, we always knew this was going to be quite contentious.

The thing that has complicated it, of course, has been that the situation in Ireland has now changed. So we also took that on board in the evidence. I was asked by the Steering Committee to say this would not be the occasion to discuss our draft report — you haven't got it in front of you, and we haven't got the minority report anyway — but I am simply saying what the procedure is. We took the evidence in Dublin, in the light of the result of the referendum, and the minority member — I call him a minority member because he wasn't a majority member — felt that he needed a bit of time to get his minority report sorted out. So, we've agreed that we shall meet again at the end of June. We shall agree the report, hopefully. We'll also proceed with our next study on minority languages, and then that report should then be available to go to the next plenary, in the autumn.

I know there's a delay, but I think it's unavoidable, and I think we're doing our best to accommodate different views in the Committee, and I think that's fair to everybody. I hope it's the most helpful way forward. So, if all goes well, at the next plenary, you'll get the main report as agreed by the majority of the Committee, and you'll have a minority report attached to that.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much, Alf. Are there any questions to Alf?

Lord Bruce of Bennachie:

On your minority languages, I wondered whether you were going to include consideration of the status of sign languages, and, if you hadn't considered doing that, I wonder if you could — both British and Irish sign languages — because there are a lot of issues around them, and it would be helpful if you could include them.

Lord Dubs:

Shall I deal with that now or shall I wait for the [*Inaudible.*] The answer is —. Gosh, you scored a bullseye there. No, we hadn't — at least, I certainly hadn't considered it. Thank you very much; we'll feed that in.

Lord Murphy of Torfaen:

I don't want to argue the point for and against abortion, but simply say that the constitutional positions over the last year and, hopefully, in the next six months, will change, so any consideration of dealing with the difficult subject of abortion has to take that into account. Now, I accept absolutely the world has changed in Ireland after the referendum, but when I was the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, this issue, of course, was raised a number of times with me, and I wouldn't take a decision one way or the other because I wanted the Assembly, to which, of course, the issue of abortion is devolved, to take that decision. The problem has been, of course, over the last couple of years that there is no Assembly, and the world is changing, but I think the issue now is, hopefully, by the time we meet in the autumn, there will be an Assembly and there will be an Executive. Of course, one of the working parties which are looking at the different issues, include one on the petition of concern, because one of the issues surrounding this issue and same-sex marriage is the use of the petition of concern in order to veto any developments on abortion or same-sex marriage. Now, if the rules on the petition of concern change, I assume it will be that simple majorities in the Assembly would decide one way or the other on these issues.

So, the whole point I make is that we have to be careful in what we are doing not to go against what might be political and constitutional developments in Northern Ireland over the next couple of months. So, I'm not talking about whether there should or shouldn't be changes in abortion. I simply refer to the constitutional changes that might affect the decision-making with regard to these difficult issues.

Lord Dubs:

Yes, I take note of that. I'm in some difficulty, because I don't want to get, as it were, enticed into talking about the content of the report, which is not fair, as you haven't got the draft report in front of you, but I take Paul's point. I will say this — I'm going further than I should — there are two ways of changing the law or considering changes in the law in Northern Ireland. One is to have the Assembly back and they can do it, and the petition of concern point is particularly important — thank you, Paul — because, of course, that would affect the ability of the Assembly to reach a majority decision without being stifled by a minority. So, I think that is important, if that is how the Assembly will then be up and running on a changed basis. So, obviously, that's important.

The alternative path, which was a path pointed to us by the House of Commons Committee which has just produced the report on abortion, is to go down the human rights path and to say that human rights is not a devolved matter and that the present position in Northern Ireland denies human rights to women and that, therefore, human rights would be the responsibility of the Westminster government and so it could be legislated upon without there being a devolved Assembly. Now, those are the two ways one can do it. Clearly, if Paul's optimism comes forward and there will be an Assembly up and running in Belfast before too long, as we all fervently hope there will be, then, of course, the Assembly could take that with it before the British Government could decide whether to go down the human rights path, but there are these two alternative ways forward.

Mr Cathal Boylan:

Go raibh maith agat, Chair. Just a couple of things. I want to put on record my thanks to Ian Milne, my former colleague, who was on the Committee before me and for his contribution to the Committee. I want to endorse the position taken by the Chair in relation to the approach we took yesterday in relation to Committee D. I just want to also put on record, Chair, we're trying to respect the integrity of the Committee and the Committee's work so we thought this was the best approach to allow a minority report but the reason why I want to put it on record is because we have a duty in terms of the evidence we gathered and a responsibility to respect the evidence of all stakeholders over the last two years. So, I hope that the steering committee will respect that and use that approach in the future by the true minority and majority reports. I just want to put that on record and also my thanks to the administrative staff who put a lot of work and effort, and all the members of the Committee. But, I just want to endorse the approach that we've taken so far in relation to this and I look forward to a proper debate, obviously at the next plenary in relation to the report itself. Go raibh maith agat.

Lord Dubs:

Can I endorse what you said: I'd like to thank both the members of the Committee and indeed the staff. It's been a tough one this; it's not been as straightforward as some and the clerk, Tristan Stubbs, has done a lot of work in pulling things together. We'd hoped at one point we could get to agree the report but that was a bit optimistic. So, I'm really grateful to members of the Committee, and the previous members of the Committee, for the way they have cooperated and the way we have reached an amicable agreement to disagree on the basis that we disagree.

Karin Smyth:

Thank you, Chair. I wasn't going to speak but, as a member of the Committee, I've been to all the hearings over the last four years and, like most of us, we have our own views on this which I've never shied away from. However, the report is generally about cross-jurisdictional issues and the fact that women do travel, so we really wanted to highlight the cross-jurisdictional implications of that.

On the point about things moving and changing, the other discussion, just to add to the Chair's response that we discussed, is the fact that the case is going through the Supreme Court at the moment, So, as well as, hopefully, the reconstitution of Stormont happening and decisions being made there, on the other side, depending on where you stand on the human rights or the health aspect, or indeed the rights of the unborn child, the case is going through, So, we think that we actually, by the time we get to June, we might have some different things to report on that as well, so we accept that the situation is a moving feast constitutionally and legally across jurisdictions and, you know, we'd have to try and reflect that in our reports as well before we come forward in October; a lot of things may have changed by that point. Thank you.

Lord Dubs:

Thank you for that, Karin.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

OK. Paul Coghlan.

Senator Paul Coghlan:

Thank you Co-Chair. I would briefly like to salute what the Committee has done and compliment Alf and his Committee on their stance. It's very important to have the minority report, I believe, in that instance because there's a huge minority in Ireland, North and South, on this issue and there are perceived conflicting rights and the right to life. So, I commend your work totally.

10.00 am

Lord Dubs:

Thank you for that. I know we've had little discussions and we're not totally eye to eye on everything, but thank you for that.

Mr Paul Givan:

Thank you, Mr Chairman. I thank Lord Dubs for outlining where we are as a Committee. I'm the member that wishes to put forward the minority report on this; indeed, I hope to bring forward a report that will seek to change the main report.

I know today is not the day to get into the substance of a detailed debate on every aspect of this inquiry and the conclusions that are contained within it, but, from the outset, the report that is before members doesn't mention — as Senator Coghlan indicated there are conflicting rights — anywhere the rights of the unborn child. So, from the outset, the report flows that it is purely a women's rights issue and makes no recognition at all of the unborn child. That's something that I want to redress, and indeed I hope to bring forward to the next plenary a more considered position that hopefully will shape the actual report. If it comes to it that it has to be a minority report, I'll seek as much support for that minority report when it comes.

The report focuses almost entirely on Northern Ireland, but, when you look at the inquiry, it was the cross-jurisdictional implications of abortion policy. Nowhere does it indicate that Great Britain has got this fundamentally wrong, nowhere does it say that the 1967 Act has resulted in over eight million deaths of unborn children, nowhere does it say in the report that Northern Ireland, as a result of not having the '67 Act, has got 100,000 people alive today because we didn't implement the '67 Act in Northern Ireland or indeed in the Republic of Ireland.

So, you can see, members, where I'm going to be coming from in respect of this report. We'll have a much more detailed debate on it; I'm quite happy to engage in that debate. But just to deal with Lord Murphy's point, I think he is right: this is a sensitive point in which talks are now ongoing to try and get the restoration of the Assembly. For some people like myself, this is a fundamentally important reason why I support devolution. Take that away and some people will be questioning the relevance of devolution if there isn't the ability for the United Kingdom to respect the different cultures and different approaches to these issues. So, members should proceed with caution in respect of these issues.

Finally, the petition of concern is often viewed as something that my party has abused in the denial of what people would regard as so-called "progressive rights". It was the petition of concern that was used against legislation that I brought forward with the Ulster Unionist Party and with the SDLP that would've closed down the Marie Stopes clinic when it opened in Belfast; I had a double figures majority vote to do it, and the petition of concern was deployed to stop a change in the law in respect of it. So, this cuts both ways, and I'll seek to reflect that in a future report that we'll take to BIPA. Thank you.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you, Paul. Alf, would you like to respond to that?

Lord Dubs:

Well, obviously Paul, he's — you've now heard why we're having a minority report, because there is an argument there. The minority report will accommodate the views you've just heard; they don't reflect the views of the majority of the Committee, but they do represent an important strand of opinion. That's why we're having the minority report, so that you can say exactly what you think is wrong with the main report and put forward an alternative point of view, and then the plenary can debate that and consider it.

Look, thank you. I think it's the only way forward. If we didn't have a minority report, the whole thing would die a death or we'd've had to force it through on a vote here. That would've been an uncomfortable way forward. I think that's the general sense of the way we approach things. So, thank you for supporting the approach which we have, and the approach we have is agreed by all members of the Committee.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much. That concludes those reports. Seán.

PROGRESS REPORT FROM COMMITTEE B (EUROPEAN AFFAIRS)

**SECOND INTERIM REPORT ON EUROPEAN SECURITY COOPERATION
AFTER BREXIT, PORT SECURITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Committee B report. Second interim report on European security cooperation, port security and infrastructure. I call on Darren Millar AM to give his update and present the report of Committee B to the Assembly. Darren.

Darren Millar AM:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair. I'm delighted to be able to present this short interim report following the further evidence sessions which the Committee has undertaken in both Dublin and Holyhead ports, as part of its European security cooperation after Brexit inquiry.

Members will be aware that we presented a short interim report at the October plenary, following evidence sessions that we undertook in both Dublin and Belfast, where we heard from a range of stakeholders and experts on the issues which we'd identified to look at. Of course, we embarked upon this particular piece of work because we didn't really feel that sufficient attention was being paid to cooperation on security matters post-Brexit.

The evidence sessions that I want to report to you on today were held in both Dublin and Holyhead at the end of March. In those locations, we met the Dublin Port Company and indeed Stena, who operate the port in Holyhead in addition to Irish Ferries, one of the other ferry operators that operates traffic between Holyhead and Dublin.

I have to say that the time that we spent in the ports was fascinating. We received some very interesting evidence, and I think it's fair to say that we very much appreciated the time that we were given as a Committee by the Dublin Port Company, Irish Ferries and Stena because it gave us an appreciation of the work that's gone into some of the Brexit scenario planning, particularly on the Irish side.

Dublin port has experienced significant growth in its freight traffic in particular in recent years, especially in roll-on, roll-off traffic, and a number of new routes have been developed as a result of the Brexit contingency planning that has been undertaken by the port. We heard that new routes to Zeebrugge and Rotterdam were increasing in their frequency and indeed that there were many more goods being shipped between those locations and directly into Dublin port rather than over the UK land bridge from Holyhead to Dublin, but the port is very much constrained by space. We were taken on a tour around the port by the Dublin Port Company and it was very clear that there was very limited capacity, really, to extend the port's operations and, as a result of that, the port has developed a masterplan, which will see significant sums invested in trying to make the port more efficient and help it to increase its capacity in terms of the goods that are shipped through it.

One thing that we found very interesting is that part of that masterplan has effectively been brought forward as a result of the Brexit contingency plans, and they've been buying back pockets of land from individuals who've owned different parts of the site at Dublin port in recent years. I think that we were told that they'd spent about €30 million buying back property in preparation for Brexit as part of this €1 billion infrastructure upgrade that the port is receiving over the course of the masterplan.

The Dublin Port Company's held a number of different Brexit workshops for the government agencies that it works with and the shipping companies and hauliers that engage with it, which of course have helped the individuals involved in those workshops to prepare for the impact of Brexit. It's worked very closely of course with the Office of Public Works on the requirements on the site, particularly on the additional checks that might be required on agricultural and food products should a no-deal Brexit actually happen. They did emphasise to us the significant challenge that a no-deal Brexit would pose because of the potential delays in checking agricultural and food products. Huge new warehouses and scanning technology were being installed at the site and they were trying to make it easier to stack vehicles that might have to wait before their loads were inspected. I think it's fair to say that, as a Committee, we were very impressed by the contingency plans that were under way.

One cause for concern though was that we were told that quite a number of new customs officials would need to be recruited should a no-deal Brexit happen and no work had actually started on that recruitment. Obviously, you know, it's a matter of regret to us that all this planning is going ahead in the face of uncertainty. Much of this investment, much of the expenditure, may not need to have actually taken place depending on the outcome of the Brexit negotiations.

We then met Irish Ferries while we were in Dublin. They expressed their misgivings around Brexit and concerns about the different regulatory approaches that might develop over a period of time between the UK and the EU. In particular, they expressed a concern that there may be a need for new passenger checks post Brexit, because, obviously, it's not just a matter of goods crossing between Holyhead and Dublin: there are huge numbers of foot passengers and car passengers, too. So, they were concerned that, should there be any additional checks, then that, again, would add to the delays in people being able to get on and off the ferries when they are trying to turn them around.

They also told us that they are having increasing requests for movement of goods and people between their Dublin and Cherbourg link and, as a result of that, they're putting new vessels onto that link and they expect that that will continue to grow and develop as people try to find alternative routes into continental Europe from the island of Ireland. As I say, though, I think

our biggest concern, really, was that there was huge effort, huge expense, going into all of these preparations and that they may not be required at the end of the day.

We then crossed from Dublin to Holyhead, and we had the opportunity, while we were on board, to speak with the captain on the captain's bridge. He told us about the practical operations of the ferry, and I think it's fair to say that Steve Aiken, with his maritime history, was very keen to look at the technology that was on board. Indeed, he identified a number of military ships that were in the Irish Sea undertaking various training operations while we were on board.

It was a very comfortable crossing. The date of the crossing, of course, was interesting because it was the 29th of March, the date on which the UK was planning to leave the EU, and of course we were glued to the screens, watching the various votes that were taking place in the House of Commons on the different options.

Anyway, once we got to Holyhead, we had a tour of Holyhead from the port services manager, Alan Williams of Stena. I have to say, there was quite a different approach at Holyhead than the approach being taken in Dublin. We were told that the UK Government had informed Holyhead port that it was not planning to impose any additional checks on any of the vehicles that were coming from Ireland and that they were able to take a more flexible approach, shall we say, because of the UK Government's plan to try to minimise disruption post-Brexit. They expected that there might be just some minimal checks that would add around 30 seconds to processing times at peak periods. Of course, they also have the benefit, on the Holyhead side, of having a significant ability to stack vehicles down the A55, which of course is a significant dual carriageway that essentially goes straight into the port. They clearly don't have that ability in Dublin.

One issue that was raised with us as a point of concern in Holyhead was the different approach to passenger name record requirements and checks between seaports and airports. There was a very visible security presence, I think it's fair to say, at Holyhead port. People were being asked for their identification documents as soon as they disembarked the ship, and it very much felt like an airport security operation. We were told by Stena, however, that the passenger name checks that are required for airports are quite different from those on ferries. We felt that this was something that needed following up, really, and that's why we are hoping to take up these issues of passenger name checks during the next part of our inquiry, when we take some evidence in London later this year, at either the end of September or early October.

So, we are very grateful to everybody who provided evidence. We have circulated copies of the report. I am very happy to take questions. Just one final thing that I wanted to say on behalf of the Committee is that some clerking changes have been announced to us, and I want to put on record the thanks of Committee B to Harriet Deane, who is going to be leaving the Committee. She has done an exceptional job in serving the Committee during her tenure.

Of course, she has been ably supported in that role by Eoin Egan, the Irish clerk, but we are getting a new British clerk in Dr Libby McEnhill, and we look forward to working with her. We met her, obviously, at our first meeting on Sunday afternoon.

I commend the report to the Assembly and very much hope that it will be adopted.

10.15 am

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd:

I agree with Darren as a member of the Committee and agree that we were well briefed in Dublin port and, indeed, in a different way, in Holyhead. The first thing is that everybody is challenged for their ID, both in the UK and in Ireland, so it is important to come with your passport. I had mine, but I wonder what would have happened if you did not. So, while it is a common travel area, it is a fact.

The second is that, if there is any argument for Remainers, they should go to Dublin port, just spending millions of pounds to stand still. Basically, all of our trade going each way is being put under severe pressure — administrative pressure, additional checks and so on — if and when Brexit happens. Obviously, clearly, we will have to comply with whatever decisions apply in the EU and the UK; nevertheless, it identifies, at the moment, how much of a disadvantage it is to Britain and Ireland that this will happen.

It works very effectively at the moment, but Dublin port would be under severe and increasing pressure the harder the Brexit is. For Members, it might be useful if they got a briefing, if that were possible. Ultimately, I am absolutely convinced that the closer we are in terms of our future relationships, regardless of the decision of the British Parliament, the better for all of us.

One thing that we did not actually go into struck me. I presume that there will be a diversion of trade through Belfast or Larne and Dublin — from Northern Ireland as well — and the implications that will have for business in both jurisdictions is something else that we should consider. I know that some industries in the North are either relocating or sending their produce through the South now rather than through Larne because they will have an EU badge, not for the land bridge but for the direct route to Europe. It will impact on trade. One issue that was pointed out was we need a 500% increase in our customs clearance agents in Ireland. We only have 50 at the moment. There is a huge business deficit there at the moment that we must address.

It was very useful. I must say that I never realised how good Steve Aiken's eyesight was. When you look into the shadow and mist and can identify a destroyer by name and size and the complement of men on board, you are some guy.

The last point is that we should also mention that the Holyhead port services manager, who gave us an excellent tour of the facility, has also in the past doubled as mayor, I think, of Holyhead. I think he is standing for election shortly as well. He gave us an entertaining but informative tour of the facility.

Darren Millar AM:

I just wanted to reiterate really that significant investment is taking place at both ports, partly because of the pressures on capacity that Fergus has just referred to and partly in terms of the preparation for Brexit.

The Dublin port authority — Dublin Port Company — was really investing heavily around Brexit. The situation in Holyhead was quite different, really. There was a much more relaxed approach, I think it is fair to say, from Stena, as the port operator, to the impact of Brexit on the port. It did not feel that there was any sense of emergency in Holyhead at all. The attitude was, "We can take everything in our stride" really, which was quite different from the Irish side.

Passenger security and identification was a key issue that we picked up, and we want to investigate it more. We want to make sure that our ports are safe from a passenger point of view. We know that we have more and more organised crime. There were many radiation

detectors, for example, at Holyhead port that were very visible and that every vehicle has to pass through, as a result of the security concerns on the British side. It was interesting that that sort of infrastructure was not as visible in Dublin, but, clearly, the installation of new facilities and equipment was going to enable that sort of infrastructure to be installed.

Lord Bruce of Bennachie:

Thanks to Darren for a good, fair summary of the report.

There are just a couple of things I wanted to add. One that he did not mention was that, in order to manage the potential stacking of vehicles, the Dublin port have taken land at the airport where they are going to park vehicles. What you then realise is that some of those vehicles could be parked for two or three days before the port could handle them. There is also, if they did not do that, the real potential, which they are absolutely trying to avoid, that it would lead to pretty serious congestion in the city of Dublin. I think they feel that they have organised that so that it will happen, but it is clearly a big problem. The port area is very constrained, and they have had to be pretty creative and imaginative to maximise the use of all the land they have. In some cases, it has not led to the most efficient routing, because of obstacles in the way or buildings that they do not have control over, at least for the time being.

There was one figure that did not go into the report because we were not entirely clear how exactly it applied, but, basically, in the event of no deal, as I understood it, 100% of food products have to be inspected. There are some agricultural products where it was a lower level of inspection. When you start to think about that kind of inspection and maybe a couple of minutes a vehicle and you add the numbers of the vehicles together, you pretty quickly realise that it is a major issue, both in cost and time delay.

There is the point about the ferries to Cherbourg and so forth. Yes, it is an alternative, and it avoids obviously going out of the EU, but it is not a cheaper alternative. The problem is that Cherbourg is not really in the mainstream, so you have to get from Cherbourg onto the main motorway network. It is a compromise that I do not think would be being developed at the speed at which it is being developed but for Brexit. It is just trying to provide an alternative. People should bear it in mind that, with no deal, there are serious implications for the management of facilities at ports and costs and delays. Even with a deal — we have no idea what it is — there are still likely to be requirements for more checks than is currently the case.

Dublin port's capacity, physically, is limited, but I agree with Darren: I am very impressed by the management's approach, even if, as Fergus would say, under the cover they are saying, "Bloody hell, the money we are having to spend here for something that may never happen". They are pretty irritated by it, but, that said, they have done it and have done it with a considerable degree of creative imagination. Give them credit for that.

Darren Millar AM:

Yes. I agree entirely with Malcolm. It was evident to us that there was an extremely efficient operation in Dublin. We were told that it was essentially twice as efficient as Rotterdam and almost three times as efficient as Barcelona in the volume of goods that it was able to handle in the space that they have available. That is why they were exploring the opportunity to take some of their non-core activities, if you like, and relocate them further inland in order to free up areas around the port where necessary. They were also talking about introducing charges,

if I remember, for those who left goods there that were not being collected. That is another innovation, if you like, that has come as a result of the constrained space at the port.

There is lots of significant investment, much of which may not be necessary. I hope that that investment will prove to be useful, regardless of what sort of Brexit takes place, because it would be a sorry state indeed if tens of millions of euro were spent in Dublin for nothing. It is fair to say that their contingency plans are well advanced. As I said, the only thing, I think, that they were still having some challenge about was how to recruit sufficient customs officials in the event of a no-deal Brexit in order to undertake the checks that Malcolm Bruce described.

Lords Dubs:

Thank you for an interesting report. I wonder if I could just widen the discussion a little. I also serve on a House of Lords European Sub-Committee, and we went to Dover. One of the things about Dover that your Committee may have picked up is that a significant proportion of the freight going from Dover to the continent comes from Ireland. Therefore, any delays in Dover, either way, could have a knock-on effect for Ireland.

I will give you the figures. Dover has no space. The Felixstowe container terminal has masses of space — most of it comes from outside the EU — but, in Dover, there is very little space. It is almost a seamless operation, provided there are no hiccups. Now, what they said to us — this is why it is important to note the difference between a good-deal Brexit and a no-deal Brexit — is that to clear a freight container from within the EU takes, at the moment, under two minutes. That may compare with your 30 seconds in your report, but, anyway, it takes under two minutes. Here is the shocking figure: to clear a container from outside the EU in Dover can take an average of one hour and a quarter. That is why Kent is liable to become a car park.

They have stacking operations in Dover for when the French farmers blockade Calais, which happens occasionally, but this would be more extensive and would affect Irish freight. The stacking operation is such that many of the motorways in Kent will be there for stacking. They are even going to put Portalooos along the motorways so that lorry drivers who are waiting can have a pee — they may be there a long time — if I can be so indelicate as to refer to that. It is a big problem.

They said it would take them years to reconfigure Dover port to accommodate a no-deal Brexit. If there is a good deal, it is fine — they can just continue as before — but I repeat: the reason I have diverted the discussion to a Select Committee that went to Dover is that this could have a significant knock-on effect to freight going to and from Ireland. They talked about the alternative operation of going to Cherbourg: that is very costly. Economically, the best way for Irish freight is to come straight through from Dover. It is a potential problem, and maybe you can take that on board when you do your further work.

Darren Millar AM:

It was made clear to us by the ferry companies that the alternative routes without using the land bridge, going straight from Dublin to continental Europe — Zeebrugge or Cherbourg — were not ideal, particularly if perishable goods were being transferred, because of the time that it takes. Clearly, Dover is the port of choice to get as many goods through as possible because of the relative brevity of the crossing time.

We are aware that the UK Government were hoping to increase capacity at some of the other ports in the south. We had an infamous ferry contract, I think, that was awarded and then

withdrawn in terms of extra shipping at Ramsgate and some of the other ports. Clearly, we need to be cognisant of the fact that, if there are additional lengthy checks, that will tie up significant assets, if you like, in Dover and cause us massive logistical problems. It did not escape our attention, if you like, during the discussions, particularly with the ferry operators, that we needed to find solutions to the capacity issues that might emerge.

10.30 am

Deputy Fergus O’Dowd:

The key issue about checks is that if they can take place at the point of origin of the goods or where they are dispatched from or at points remote from the actual ports themselves, and that once the vehicle reaches the port that all the checks are done that will reduce the time that’s lost. The same with customs, that if all the checks can be — by managing at the point of origin. I think that’s why it’s hugely important — regardless, again, of what happens in the UK — that the professional customs people link in together to make sure that trade in Britain and the rest of Europe continues as freely as possible notwithstanding the changes that might have to be. I think that’s absolutely imperative.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Do you want to come in?

Darren Millar AM:

It was very clear that there were trusted company relationships, if you like, and that the technology does exist to be able to undertake a good proportion of these checks at the depots from which the goods are despatched. There was clearly a desire to get as much of the work and the paperwork done electronically and away from the ports as possible. It was particularly reiterated to us by the person we met, Alan Williams, at Holyhead port. He told us about some of the workings of the goods checks, the different forms that need to be filled in, and he was reasonably confident that there were workarounds, if you like, in order to prevent unnecessary delay when people arrived at the port itself.

Karin Smyth:

Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the committee. I think that’s an absolutely fascinating sounding. I’m very sorry to have missed the trip. It sounded like that was interesting. This is a very valuable report, actually, just hearing you talk through. I think it is one of those we’ve talked about before that it is perhaps incumbent on us all to try and raise it in our own jurisdictions. Bristol was obviously a significant port many years ago, but is a home to many of the food and drinks industry, particularly, new industries such as the smoothie factory in my constituency. We make a lot of the additional materials for fancy lattes and coffees and so on.

Now those contents originate from all over the world and go out all over. Beneath this they’ve got no idea what the arrangements will be for bringing things in or out. And without going through the whole customs issue, the attitude you highlighted in Holyhead is a bit like some of these business owners, some of whom I met last week, don’t know yet what the rules upon which they will be trading in a matter of months’ time. It really is quite astonishing, let alone how their goods are getting to and from ports, and they’re having to forward sell or stock up or and some of these goods don’t have a shelf life. This delay — whenever on earth we understand in the UK how we will be trading is really important. I think the detail to

which you've gone to in the different ports and the different arrangements being had — it is of genuine interest in the debate throughout.

I guess a message to self and to others that somehow we do try and highlight that the work that you've done and Thank you for bringing it to us.

Darren Millar AM:

Yes, thank you for that Karin. I'm grateful for your comments and I'm sure that the other committee members are grateful for the fact that you want to highlight some of our work. But I think just to put the difference in attitude into context, it was very clear that the UK Government had told Holyhead port operators that they didn't want any delays post-Brexit. They wanted to minimise disruption even in the event of a no-deal Brexit, they wanted the same number of vehicles checked that is currently the case.

That flexibility isn't afforded to the Irish authorities because of EU membership requirements in terms of actually checking goods and passengers on the way into the EU. So that's why there was this very different approach in both ports to the Brexit preparations. You did sort of get the impression that it was a "suck it and see" operation and approach in Holyhead, and they would deal with issues as they arose or should they arise.

Whether that is a good or bad way to prepare, I don't know, but it was very clearly a difference in the approach at both ports which was as a result of the different approach of the two Governments: the UK Government and the Irish Government towards having to apply the EU rules on the Irish side and the flexibility with the rules on the UK side.

John Scott:

Can I just commend the hard work of my colleagues who went on these trips, and I did not, due to work commitments in Edinburgh, but also, apparently, Steve Aiken's eyesight, which never was in doubt, as far as I was concerned – his perceptions, at any rate. But I also just want to seriously make a point about the Larne-to-Cairnryan crossing, which I don't think our Committee has yet looked at, and how again that is the shortest sea crossing. And if Dublin becomes congested, as well it might, that could well become, depending on the border arrangements between Ireland and the North, how – that crossing may yet grow in importance, which of course has implications for us in Scotland and the Scottish Government. The A75 – is it fit for purpose, should that volume of traffic grow, or not? And so this is just another question mark that we all have to bear in mind when we're thinking about Brexit. I just wanted to make that point.

Darren Millar AM:

We didn't look in any great detail at the potential change in shipping traffic between Scotland and Northern Ireland. I think there was some suggestion that it was possible that that might occur post-Brexit, in terms of the ease of operation for moving goods and passengers from one UK port to another UK port, rather than between an EU port, if you like, and a non-EU port. But we didn't look at that issue in detail, and you're right. We should probably seek further evidence on that, actually, to bring into the final report that we do once we've completed the evidence-gathering.

Senator Paul Coghlan:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair. I commend Darren and his Committee very much on that report, but obviously the biggest difficulties for us post-Brexit are going to arise at Dover port, because 80% of our exports to continental Europe go through Britain as a land bridge

and go out through Dover. So Dover could be a huge backlog and backup, and maybe the Committee will have a further look at that before they conclude their report. Thank you.

Darren Millar AM:

Yes. This is just an interim report. As you know, it's the second interim report that we've done on this particular inquiry, and we're very happy to hear further evidence, both in terms of the issue that John Scott raised and the issue that Paul Coghlan's just raised there in terms of the impact on Dover. He's quite right; that's where most of the goods eventually end up once they hit the British mainland, and of course it's very important that there are no holdups – unnecessary holdups – at British ports on the south coast in order that the goods can flow as freely as possible. Clearly there are opportunities for other ports down in the south and southeast of England to take some of the additional capacity, should there be tailbacks in Dover, and I know that many of those ports have been seeing Brexit as a sort of business opportunity. But to what extent they'll be able to cope, given the significant volumes of traffic that currently go through Dover, we don't know. We haven't taken any significant evidence.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Anyone else want a go?

Just before – maybe just an intervention myself. I chair the Good Friday implementation committee, and we recently did a visit up to Derry port. We met the company there, and I suppose it's unique in the sense that it covers – it's cross-jurisdictional. But we also met the North West Partnership, and again it covers local authority members from both sides of the border in that particular area. They're all very keen that the port itself be developed, but it's unique in the sense that it's covered the two.

But there's also — they're looking for —. There's potentially a deep-sea element, too, you know, at Greencastle, which is in Lough Foyle as well on the Donegal side, but what they were saying was that it would open up, you know, with the development of this deep-sea element, they would be able to bring cruise ships in, and they were predicting — the port authorities, again — that, within two or three years, they would have about 100 cruise ships coming into the —. It would be transformative for the, you know, in relation to, you know, people moving into, you know, to visit that area for tourism and that. So, again, you know, as part of your work, you might consider looking at that. As I say, it is unique, and it's —. The partnership looks, you know — it's all parties and none. Covers North and South in that region, so, again, you might consider that.

Darren Millar AM:

You're quite right, Co-Chair, to raise the importance of the ports from a tourism point of view. We saw some of the —. We heard about the plans that there are in Holyhead to actually, you know, install new berths there, including one for cruise ships, and there does appear to be significant growth in the cruise market around these islands, and I think it would be remiss of us to not consider that in terms of the development of ports in the future. But I think you've given us a great deal of food for thought in terms of what we might be able to further look at around ports prior to the completion of our final report on this important issue, and, you know, I'm very grateful for all of the individuals who've taken part in the debate. Thank you.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

So, I ask the plenary to formally adopt the report of Committee B.

Report agreed.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

OK. That's agreed. I wish to commend members of Committee B for their work in completing the report, and the joint clerks will arrange to send the report to the British and Irish Governments. Alf Dubs.

Lord Dubs:

I wonder if I could just have half a minute of your time. Committee D, our Irish clerk, Alison Meagher, is — this is her last plenary. I don't know if she's here, but, anyway, this is her last plenary, and she's going off to Shanghai in the summer. To lower the tone of this conversation, Committee D spent a long time wondering whether there's any way in which we could recommend a visit to Shanghai by the Committee. So far, we've not managed to solve that one, but we would welcome any help and advice from mem—. But it's sort of on our distant agenda, but in case the Co-Chairs think we're gonna break the budget, it's on a very distant agenda, but I really would like to thank Alison for her enormous help and wish her good luck in Shanghai.

Some Members:

Hear, hear.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

OK, we're just gonna take a short coffee break. The next group is here; I realise you're probably coming from breakfast, but, for those who haven't, so, we're just, you know, for their — to allow them to come in and set up, we'll just take a short break. OK? Thank you. Again, if people want to, you know —. I think checkout is at 12 o'clock in relation to the hotel, so, again, just to remind people of that.

The sitting was suspended at 10.43 am.

The sitting was resumed at 11.08 am.

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS:
NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL OF IRELAND**

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

So I'm pleased to welcome representatives from the National Youth Council of Ireland, who have come here today to talk to us about their work on sustainable development goals. So, can I ask you to welcome our guests: Valery, Saoi and Jamie. *[Applause.]* Our guests will take a few minutes each, which will leave them time for contributions and questions from the floor and responses from our panellists. So, over to you, guys. Who's in charge?

Saoi O'Connor (National Youth Council of Ireland):

So, my name is Saoi O'Connor, I'm 16 and I'm from Skibbereen. This Friday will be my 18th week striking from school. City Hall is two hours from my house by bus and I get up three hours earlier to get to City Hall for nine than I do to get to school. I began in early January. I started alone sitting outside City Hall for roughly seven hours every Friday and, from there on in, there were two or three of us picketing outside City Hall every week. On March 15th, the Gardaí counted 5,000 young people outside City Hall climate-striking for their futures

and demanding action. It was the largest march in Cork in decades. People regularly tell me that it's pointless to strike, that standing outside City Hall with a placard will not achieve anything, but they're wrong because the point of striking is to get across to people like you, because you do have the power to achieve the things that we are demanding. My future is in the hands of people like you, as are the futures of those 5,000 young people, as is the future of our species.

A lot of people, most of them older than me, are able to say, "I first heard about global climate change when I was x years old". I am not able to say this. For me, climate change is something that I grew up with. I, like many of my generation, do not know what it is like to grow up without the looming threat of climate disruption.

When I was in primary school, my town flooded. People were photographed paddling boats down our main street, and it took my mother and I several hours to make the 10-minute journey home. For as long as I can remember, these kinds of events have been a part of my reality.

When my primary school got its green flag — something that had been achieved through the students making colourful art projects out of waste plastic and putting up laminated signs telling us to turn off the lights — our school ordered us chips and sausages from the takeaway down the road.

Climate change was something that had always been presented to my generation as an opportunity to be proactive, never as a crisis that must be addressed. We were taught about the changing climate, this existential threat to our collective futures, so casually we almost became desensitised to the crisis. Almost.

The emperor has no clothes. We all pretend like something is happening. We all see policies being made and motions being put forward yet there is no change in the way we are living on this planet. We are in the streets all over Europe, all over the world, because we do not see that change, because we are no longer willing to pretend that adequate change is happening. In Greta's words, we are here to tell you that change is coming, whether you like it or not.

Valery Molay (Young Voices):

Hi. Sorry, I don't have my voice today but I'm still going to try to speak.

So, my name is Valery and I'm here on behalf of Young Voices, which is the European structured dialogue here in Ireland. So, in all European countries, it's called the European structured dialogue. In Ireland, we young people decided to call it Young Voices because we wanted to give a spin to the Commission's initiatives. We thought "structured dialogue" seemed too structured. We wanted it to be about the voices of young people.

So, how we got involved is through NYCI. Like Saoi just talked about, we nearly got desensitised. We nearly stopped paying attention to the changes that need to happen in our society, but we didn't, and platforms such as the National Youth Council of Ireland gave us that opportunity to become the change-makers that we wanted to be.

So, I got involved in Young Voices because the structure taught me that I didn't just need to talk about what's going wrong in society but have the opportunity to now talk with decision-makers to together come up with a solution because we cannot always point out the problem but we have to focus about how we make the change, how do we get to the other side. So, this is why I got involved with Young Voices.

So, for the two cycles that I have been in staying with the topic of environmental climate action because the recent Eurobarometer told us that the most important topic for young people is climate action because as much as we're seeing all the different reports coming out for the IPCC, nothing is changing, and we are the ones who are going to live with the consequences of climate inaction, if not to say that we are not already living with them.

So, during cycle 4, which was about youth participation, we ended up talking about how we want to change policy. So, in Ireland, we work with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to come up with what we call "youth checks", an assessment tool for policy that makes sure that young people are not forgotten in any form of policy.

We purposely designed the youth checks on the basis of the SDGs to respond to the crisis that we thought that was going on in our society. We are lucky enough that we have asked for in the implementation phase the cooperation of different Departments, of which the Environment Department is one. We don't just want to see things being said out there.

It's nice enough to tell us, "We have this coming up", "We are curtailing this", "We have plans for this", but we want physical actions. We want to see things progress — not just words, but actual action. I think Youth Check is one of those tools that will allow us to do that, because when a policy is coming out, it's going through that process of making sure that whatever result that policy will have, how will it impact young people?

11.15 am

Another tangible action the young people are taking with young voices is the European youth strategy which came out of cycle 6. Again, a resounding voice of young people at the youth summit talked about how climate change was the biggest threat and the topic that they wanted to see changes. So, young people from Ireland and all around Europe put forward what we call sustainable green Europe. By that, we included in our document that we want a Europe or a national government that, first, moves away from talking about security, borders and economic growth. Those are what got us in this position in the first place, so we need to go beyond that. We cannot realistically think that we're going to solve a problem with the exact same tool that got us in the problem. It's like using a dirty cloth to clean your table. It's not going to work. There comes a point where you have to wash the cloths and even throw it out and take another cloth. So, this is what we're asking when we're seeing a sustainable green Europe: a Europe where policymakers are, first, thinking about policies and direction; that, first, respond to the crisis that we have, which is climate; and that have other benefits. We young people are sick and tired of having economic policies that have somehow, somewhere in the back of their head, the environmental problem.

If, today, we have what we've seen many times, where we have what we call "a security emergency". Everything, first, goes through responding to the security threat. So, why is it that this, what we call "a climate threat" is somehow apparently going to be resolved and not put forward. So, again, this is one of our submissions to the European Parliament and our national government, because, again, as people always love to insinuate that the European Parliament is a body of its own, but we do not agree — it's made up of national governments, so it is our national government that is up there. The European institution is not something that is independent of us; it is not something that is running on its own. It's running based on people who we have elected. That is responding to us. So, it's not separate from European citizens at all.

My third point in terms of climate action is what we young people —. What's amazing about goal 13 in the SDGs is that it cannot be responded. If you really think of goal 13, you cannot

respond to it unless you look at every other goal at the same time. So, dealing with climate change will force us to deal with inequalities in our society. Dealing with climate change will force us to rethink how we see work today: how do we understand work? Dealing with climate change will basically force us to rethink how our society is working, our healthcare and what's important. Where should we put our energy? As a delegate, I went with the European delegation to the European-African forum and took part in the environmental cluster. One amazing thing that came out of the environmental cluster was that we were the only cluster that, loudly, said, "Enough about this partnership of receiving and giving", and having such a partnership that was completely always about one way or two ways — one way going and one way taking. We were the first and only cluster that talked about how the only way we were going to respond to the environmental issues was through innovation and changing the way we think about a partnership, and, again, this is goal 13.

Goal 13 will force us to change how we think about any partnership that we have out there in the world because the threat of climate change is not something that will be felt in one part of the world. We will all feel it one way or another and we are already feeling it and we already living it every day. And it forces us to think about climate resolution or action in terms of intersectionality; you have to think about it. There's no way we're going to risk one-to-one threat without responding to all. So, these are just the climate action or thoughts of young people in Ireland that are bringing out in terms of this SDG 13 and the SDG overall. Thank you. *[Applause.]*

Oh yes. I'm sorry, I forgot. Another example which is very tangible would be the Girl Guides with the new introduction of the environmental badge which is actually, funny enough, it's open to all categories of Girl Guides and what they do is they take a climate action and they can proudly wear the badge on them. So, that's another tangible that is cross. It doesn't matter about the age so it starts quite young at five years old you can already take part in the climate action because it's so important for young people today. Thank you.

Jamie Moore (National Youth Council of Ireland):

Thanks Valery. Hi everyone. My name is Jamie Moore. I am what's called a UN Youth Delegate representing Ireland for the year 2018 and 2019 at the UN in New York, Geneva and other structures in Brussels and so on. Just a very quick brief about what the UN Youth Delegate Programme is; every year the Irish Government's Department of Foreign Affairs, Irish Aid and the National Youth Council of Ireland manage this programme and they appoint two young people to represent Ireland at the UN. Things we do over there include delivering a national statement on behalf of our country, engaging in various process, high level political meetings, high level political forums, engaging with Ministers, senior civil servants and NGOs across the world. And our main role is to bring the voice of young people in Ireland to a global level and try to influence decisions that are being made at a global level for the betterment of our generation I suppose.

I suppose, looking at what might my predecessors did in 2017/2018, Lauren Flanagan and Paul Dockery, the two previous youth delegates put together a report called, "Generation for Change". And this report looked at how Ireland's young people viewed the sustainable development goals. They did this at the same time as the Voluntary National Review that Ireland gave at the UN last July and in fact Minister Cannon at the time shared his voluntary national review space with the young people to present their own type of a voluntary national review on the implementation of the SDGs. To put that report together they travelled around the country consulting with young people, surveying young people and gathering the views of young people. And what came out of that was that Goal 13 on climate action was the second

most important sustainable development goal to young people across the island, second only to no poverty. And what's ironic about that is they're intrinsically linked; if we address climate change, global warming, climate action and so on, whatever we're going to call it, by default you're going to eradicate poverty and make society a better place.

Every year the National Youth Council of Ireland provide a space which offers an opportunity for young people to come together at a national level from across the whole of the country, from Donegal to Kerry, to Wexford, even here, Wicklow etc. And that opportunity provides a space for them to harness their energy and, I suppose, build their capacity and empower themselves to take action on issues that are important to themselves. The youth summit is built on the sustainable development goals and every year it focuses on a different goal. Last year it focused on peace, justice and strong institutions. This year it is actually focusing on climate action and as you know as well the Irish mission to the UN is co-hosting the global climate summit in September at the UN in New York on, again, the progress on sustainable development goals and in particular climate action.

I've already spoken about the slide you can see now; that's just more detail about the youth summit.

The National Youth Council of Ireland also provide a grants scheme during what's called "one world week" to enable communities across the island to take action on the sustainable development goals to provide training to themselves and their peers on how to become youth activists and enhance their activism across the island.

But what do we actually need going forward? My colleagues have already touched on this, but we need brave politics. Maybe "brave politics" isn't the correct term; maybe it should be "braver politics", cos to be fair to our politicians across both islands over the past few years they have been brave enough to enable decisions around marriage rights and reproductive rights to be put to the people. The next social movement that is on its way up is the social issue of climate action, and there's an opportunity now to get ahead of that, and you are the decision makers that can influence that within your own parliamentary structures. Again, the issue of climate action is emerging as the next reproductive rights campaign, as the next marriage rights campaign, and it's important that we prepare for that.

The issue of climate action needs to be reframed. So when we think of climate change, a lot of us still think of plastics, a lot of us still think of turning off the water, a lot of us still think of not throwing rubbish into the ditch, you know; climate change is so much more than that. As my previous speakers have already said — or alluded to, even — when we address climate change, we're addressing the social circumstances of society's most vulnerable people; we're eradicating poverty, we're addressing the housing crisis, we're addressing health, peace, justice, we're addressing equality. What do we mean by that? At the moment, when you look at the policies and decisions that Governments make, they're economic policies and they're economic-first decisions. It's OK to make economically motivated decisions, but we should also be making environmentally motivated decisions.

When we think about our school system, our school system produces economic outputs in their students; it doesn't produce well-rounded members of society who are aware of the world around them. When we look at social protection, it's an economic protection that we're looking at; it is not a vulnerable societal protection that we're looking at. That's why we need to reframe that climate, I suppose, issue. How do you do that? You know, we can tell you this, but you need to come up with the solutions for us. You're the guys that are voting week-in, week-out in Parliaments. Again, it goes back to being braver in politics, you know. You're gonna make decisions that might not always be popular, and I know it's easy talking to

people who depend on the votes of the populace in front of us, but until we get to a point where we start reframing that discussion and reframing those decisions into something that's much more meaningful than economic output, we're not going to address society's most pressing issues. A lot of task groups are set up to address the housing crisis or the health crisis or whatever; the only task group you need is a climate action task group. That will address all those issues for us.

That's it from me. You know, a lot of people will say — my colleagues were discussing just before we came in here, a lot of people will say to us, "With age comes wisdom", but with age comes complacency as well. That's a dangerous trap that we can all fall into. So, I'll leave it there and thank you very much for having us here today; we'd be delighted to answer any questions you might have. *[Applause.]*

11:30 am

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much for your contributions. We have a number of members who wish to make comments. I will start with Gavin Newlands.

Gavin Newlands:

Thank you very much, Co-Chair. I thank you all for coming and making such a fantastic presentation. I commend you all for the work that you're doing and the action that you're taking, including the strike action. Don't let some politicians, like some of the older politicians, tell you that you shouldn't be doing it: more power to your elbow on that front. I think that that last point about complacency was a very important one. It was a good point to end on; something that I will take away and use.

From our point of view, Scotland was one of the first countries in the world to commit to the sustainable development goals. Just the other day, Scotland committed to getting to its net zero emissions target five years early, in 2045. We've made faster progress than anybody else in these islands on that front. We've got the international development fund. We've got a climate justice fund. We're the second country in the world to get fair trade status, etc. I could go on. It's clear that we have to — even Scotland, with our good results — we still have to do a lot more.

Our problem at the moment is that a lot of the powers that relate to this are in Westminster. For example, there is still a lot more capacity in Scotland for on-shore wind, but yet funding and subsidies for that are non-existent. Carbon capture and storage schemes which we'd planned in Scotland have been cut twice by the UK Government in recent years, and subsidies for solar — we don't get much sun in Scotland, to be fair, but subsidies for solar have been cut and now VAT is being introduced, so it's now being taxed rather than subsidised. These are all huge issues. I suppose my question would be, one, what do you think of that? You must hear politicians all the time promising the earth — literally promising the earth — about policies, but, in the end, the actions are not delivered, and, in fact, sometimes go the opposite way. So that's one thing. We've been shouting about this and getting nowhere. What would you do about it?

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Can I say that contributions will have to be a bit shorter than that, I'm afraid? We're not able to have speeches from members, just a few comments and questions.

Gavin Newlands:

It's my only contribution over the two days, Co-Chair, but thank you.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you, Gavin.

Right, so who'd like to respond to that?

Valery Molay:

Thank you so much for your contribution.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

As that was so long, let's deal with that one and then we'll do more.

Valery Molay:

Thank you so much for your contribution. I think the only answer that we can give to that is accountability and if it's not coming directly from our institutions, then the likes of the strikes will continue. Young people will still be on the street. Young people will keep on talking until the politicians hear us because we cannot continue this way. The same mentality of "This is not what we want any more" will be reflected in elections: you're not going back if you're not listening to what the people are saying. Young people are going to make sure of it now. This is why we ask, and I think this is why politicians are so very scared of lowering the voting age to 16, because they know fine well that if they do, they're not going back there any more. Unless you are ready to answer and make the change, you shouldn't be there because the whole idea of the institutions is to represent and if the institutions are not representing us any more, then we will find another way to represent ourselves, really.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Helen Jones.

Ann Jones AM:

I am Ann Jones.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Ann Jones, sorry.

Ann Jones AM:

We are roughly from the same sort of area, so it's all right. Thank you very much for your contributions. That's great. My first sortie into politics was to march on my town hall — I was roughly about the same age as you — so carry on. Don't let anyone tell you that you're doing wrong.

A Member:

You're still marching on the town hall.

Ann Jones AM:

I'm still marching on the town hall, as somebody's just said. *[Laughter.]* Yes. Quite right, too.

I represent the Welsh Assembly here. We've just appointed a Welsh youth parliament that mirrors what we're trying to do. When we were set up as a devolved nation, sustainability was one of the things that was written into the statute that allowed us to become the Assembly.

I was just wondering whether you've done any work or where you've looked at how you would be able to assist colleagues in the Welsh Youth Parliament and whether you are going to look to produce some reports, because Wales does hold some of the best recycling. I think that's given some of us who've been in it a long time the complacency to think we're tackling this, and I think there are those of us who think that we need to move forward. So I was just wondering whether you've got any ideas about how you would link up with the Welsh Youth Parliament to make sure that they can put pressure on us. One of the topics that they've chosen and balloted for and looked at amongst their members is actually climate change and climate action, so I would be interested to know how you think you can work together.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

OK. Ms Margaret Murphy O'Mahony.

Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony:

Well done. Thank you Chair.

First of all, I'd like to congratulate the three speakers and to say that I'm glad the future does seem to be safe. It's great to see such articulation and passion, and I'm especially proud of Saoi being from dear old Skibbereen in my own constituency of Cork South-West, so well done, and I will talk to you after.

Can I just ask you, please, I suppose, in my mind, the politicians are won over with regard to the whole concept of climate action, but how would you suggest educating the likes of my age group on the importance of the whole climate action situation? So if you could just maybe make suggestions. I have two sons who are really into it, both in their teens, so the youth know exactly what's happening, but I just find around my age group, you know, a lot of my own friends think the whole thing is wacky baccy, for the want of a better word. So how can I get across to them that it's not? You know, just that section, that age group, please? Thank you.

Jamie Moore:

OK. It's great to hear that Wales has set up a youth parliament that mirrors the Parliament that you have yourselves. In Ireland, we don't have that exact type of structure, but we do have local youth councils across the island, based in every local authority, and they all feed into a national executive as well, so every county in Ireland would be represented by one young person at a national level, and they would have big, general meetings where themes are also prioritised and voted on. At the moment, I believe, they are working on decision-making powers in schools, which is really interesting. But separate to that, in terms of opportunities to collaborate, the National Youth Council of Ireland is very active in the Erasmus+ space and it also has a very, very strong development education section. I am sure there would be opportunities welcomed for engagement there. If we chat after this, on the way out, we can swap contact details and try and arrange something there.

But youth participation and participation in general in Ireland is actually quite weak. We're still a very young state. Participative democracy in the UK is actually extraordinarily strong, and there's much more power in terms of participatory budgeting and so on devolved to

citizens, and it's something we're only starting to explore in Ireland. I am glad you brought that up.

One of the previous questions was, again, on the SDGs in Scotland and being a leader in the SDGs. Ireland co-negotiated the SDGs with Kenya and we showed extraordinary leadership on the negotiations of those at the time, but we're not showing extraordinary leadership in their implementation at the moment. It's not about, you know, bashing the Government, it's just about stating the duality of the situation. I am going to pass to Saoi now.

Saoi O'Connor:

So, I think with the issue of —. I mean, I see that, yeah, young people are very educated on the issue of climate. It's something that I think, particularly in the last few years, has really come to our attention. Most people that I know would be, even in the last few months with the strikes bringing more attention to it, coming to me, "Saoi, talk to me about climate", whereas before it would have been, "Just stop talking", you know? I talk about it a lot.

In terms of trying to get more awareness of the crisis because that's what it is — it is a crisis — to older people, to adults, one of our demands as school strikers is tell the truth. It's also echoed in the demands of the recent Extinction Rebellion movement. What we want from the Government and from the national broadcaster is to properly represent the urgency of the issue when they're talking about it, when they're broadcasting about it because often it's a sidelined issue or it's a niche environmental issue — that's not what it is; it's going to affect all of us — and it's not happening here, but it's happening now. So, if there was more coverage of CO2 levels — parts per million — in the air, if there was more coverage of events that are happening right now because of climate change, events like what's happening in Mozambique right now, that would raise the profile of the issue I think in that kind of age group.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Lord Bruce.

Lord Bruce of Bennachie:

Thank you very much and thank you very much for coming here. The world needs this kind of campaigning energy. But, I would pick up, Extinction Rebellion made a very specific demand which was zero carbon emissions by 2025, and I think what we need to bring together the "whacky baccy" generation and your generation is to try and find the practical measures we can get the maximum amount of support for in the fastest possible time. So, I think we need to have not just occasions where you come and tell us what you feel, we have to have a working arrangement where ideas come forward as to what needs to be done and the legislators then work with you to say, "Let's get the right balance".

I was writing about renewable energy 40 years ago — we haven't got 40 years — and it took an awful long time for people even to think about it. The technology was there. There's a lot we can do now. your energy is perhaps gonna make people around this table and others do more, but I think we also need to get a consensus on how much can we do how quickly that is politically acceptable, and I think that's where we really need to come together.

Deputy David Johnson:

Thank you. Again, can I add my own congratulations for your presentation? I have a comment rather than a question. As my colleagues from Jersey said yesterday, Jersey brought a proposition to the Assembly only two weeks ago for an emergency debate on this very

subject of climate change. I think it's fair to point out that the backbencher bringing it was motivated to do so by demonstrations by young people outside the State's Chamber. So, I'm really encouraging you to carry on that good work. That same State's member, I see from my email, has brought a proposition to introduce a free bus service from whenever, again with the view to, obviously, cutting down carbon emissions. What I'm really saying is that the youth has already influenced the way we are going in Jersey. There was also, on Saturday morning, a march by mothers supporting the same cause and, as I say, I think you are well on the way.

The other aside comment I make is that in Jersey we have a voting age of 16, and certainly when I fought the election 12 months, the most grilling I got was from a 16-year old who was handed over the reins by her father. I think that's an increasing trend; I think parents are very well aware of what is there, they are influenced by their children and I think you are, effectively, preaching to the converted to a certain extent and long may it continue. Thank you.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Delyth Jewell.

Delyth Jewell AM:

Thank you, Co-Chair. I am also a Member of the Welsh Assembly and, like my colleague Ann I want to thank you. You have inspired us. We declared the climate emergency a few weeks ago and, were it not for young people like you, then we would not be seeing just —. Like you said, with age comes complacency. I think that even though we all know, in our heart of hearts, that this issue is staring us in the face, it has taken young people to shame us into doing things. So thank you for your bravery; thank you for everything that you were doing. Is there anything else that you think we should be doing as individual politicians to make sure that we continue to engage with young people? And just — thank you. Thank you,

11.45 am

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick:

Thank you very much, and thanks for coming here today. I have always great time for the youth and I am involved in a lot of youth organisations.

Despite the Paris climate agreement, with all the promises, speeches and protests, nothing has really changed as such. I was coming down this morning and I was reading an article that said that scientists in the United States of America have detected the highest level of planet-warming carbon dioxide is in the earth at the moment. It is a record. So basically, we are doing damn all; we are doing nothing right.

Earlier on you talked about addressing poverty, health, education, housing, peace, justice and equality. And basically, I think that's what we are all saying, whether it is the youth or the politicians. I think it has come to the stage that we have to do something.

I stated yesterday that the UK was the first country in the world to call a climate emergency; Ireland was the second. So I think that now we have an opportunity to stand up for each other. I also said yesterday — I am big into fitness — and we have doctors in this country encouraging people not to go for walks because of the air pollution. Every time you turn a car on it's causing pollution. But I find now that in Ireland we seem to be going back to the old ways again. Fossil fuel is something that we are neglecting at the moment. I know that a lot of towns and cities have put smokeless bans in at the moment. That seemed to work for a

short period of time but I just don't think that we seem to be checking on what's happening. No matter in what part of the country you go for a run, you go for a walk and everything else, it is pollution.

I agree with you. Let me ask each of you of the three of you just one question. The point that I find at the moment is, if we try to do everything at once, it never happens. So I think what we would be better off doing —. Most politicians, when they are doing speeches, say these are my three points, and there is an opportunity of maybe getting something done. Each of you now, just give me what you think should be done to improve things. Air pollution to me is one of the major things at the moment. I have a six-year-old grandson, and he is absolutely mad into David Attenborough. I will be honest with you; I used to never look at David Attenborough. And now, on a Sunday afternoon, every little programme is always —. And we just see what a simple thing like plastic can do to different animals or fish.

I think the most important thing is education. If people actually saw what was happening, it would educate people more. The only problem I find with education at the moment is, every time anything goes wrong, we all say “Let's educate the people.”

You are three very intelligent young people. You have your whole future ahead of yourselves; so each of you give me what you think would be your number one to help the atmosphere. Thank you.

Lord Dubs:

Thank you. Can I just put it to you? You used the words “Tell the truth”. I am going to be really tough; it is very easy for us to agree with you, and then we go away and it's all over. And we say, “These people are wonderful.” It has got to be translated into specific action. If I was your age — God, I wish I were — and I was part of you — it is not for me to lecture you what to do — but can I just throw out a couple of ideas?

If at every election — the local election is coming, and the European election; it is a bit late for those — you had say a 10-point programme of specific commitments in terms of policy that you wanted the politicians to promise to do and move to, then I think you would be putting pressure on the politicians in a way that they couldn't get out of so easily.

I just think you have got to convert the enthusiasm and commitment that you are showing — I am trying not to be patronising and to lecture you — into ways of putting pressure on the politicians. Not just, “This is a good idea”; but specific action points, a specific manifesto to convert your ideas into specific policies. That is my plea; and then elections would take a new turn, because every time somebody was standing for an election at a local level, or at a national, European level or whatever, they would be obliged to answer to you in their constituency — whether it is in Ireland or the UK or anywhere else — in terms of are they committed totally to your 10-point or 20-point manifesto. That is the way I think you can bring the pressure to bear that converts your energy and enthusiasm into putting more pressure on politicians.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

OK. We are running out of time, but I've two final questions. So, we're going to put those, and then I'll ask the panel to round up on the points and to make any closing remarks. So, Cathal Boylan.

Mr Cathal Boylan:

Thank you, Chair, and thank you for very powerful contributions and presentations. It'll not be too long before you're sitting beside us, I think. My point is this: following on from Lord Dubs, it's OK to come and shout at Government and make your points, but I want you to be partners, whatever role you can play. Certainly, I think, over the last number of months, you are getting your message out, and that is why it's very appropriate time to have this climate change debate. We heard some good points from the Minister yesterday. My point to you — it's not so much a question — is: be partners with us, because it's going to take partners to achieve all that. And try not to achieve all of those things. I mean, you're talking about a health strategy and a poverty strategy. Those are big things, but we need to start somewhere. But all I will say to you is thank you for your contributions, but let's be partners together. Thank you, Chair.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

OK. Thank you. Finally, Frank Feighan.

Senator Frank Feighan:

Thank you. Thanks very much for your contributions. They were very, very welcome. I think sometimes politicians have to deal with very, very difficult issues such as this. It's great to have advocates like you and support like this, because I have found over the years that, as Alf Dubs said, when you tell the truth sometimes the people who have the opinions go missing and leave the politicians high and dry; I have seen it a few times. I remember 20 years ago, when I was elected to the council, my first meeting was on a proposed incinerator, and I took as much advice as I could from my cousin, who was head of environmental science, and, of course, I went to the meeting and imparted that knowledge. My political career was nearly over at that minute. I remember stopping off — it's is an anecdote — at a chip shop on the way back, as people used to do 20 years ago, and I said, "God, I'm after going to my first public meeting, and I think my political career is over", and this guy, who had nothing to do with politics, said, "Well, you don't them the truth on the way up". So, it was a big lesson. I'm not saying that we do that, but we need advocates like you.

Just one thing, what would you do regarding beef? Our Taoiseach came out and made a statement that he was going to eat less beef. He was absolutely hammered by farmers and the national media, and I didn't see too many people defending the Taoiseach. So, what is your view on that kind of very delicate situation that politicians have to deal with every day?

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

OK. So, our panel will now answer some of the points they've heard and make their final contributions.

Jamie Moore:

I will think we'll go one after the other. You left the hardest question to last, and it's not going to be the first one I answer either. I agree with nearly everything all of you are saying, to be honest with you. It resonates that it isn't about us coming in here talking at you and then walking away and not helping to solve the problems. Many of you asked how can we work better together. There are a few practical suggestions I have that could potentially be worked into even this structure. It's about bringing young people to the table. It's not just about bringing them in for a few hours. It's about making them permanent members of the table. If the table's not big enough, make the table bigger. You know, add an extra chair, get closer together and so on. Most of the states involved here do have youth participation structures at a national level. Why not have a youth forum version of the British-Irish Parliamentary

Assembly? That's a very simple, practical, low-cost step that we could work on, even for the next meeting of this Assembly or the one after that.

As well as that, we've seen how Governments can work in a cross-party way when they're under pressure to do so. An example of that in Ireland would be the Sláintecare programme that was launched by the Department of Health; it got cross-Government support. There's also the abortion referendum in terms of educating our politicians on the sensitive topic of abortion and then producing an outcomes document at the end that most, if not all, of the politicians were agreeable to. You can do exactly the same thing around climate action. Again, this is me trying to give a practical suggestion.

A few countries have now declared climate emergencies, but what is the definition of a climate emergency? What are we actually going to do differently? Let's actually come up with that definition together. Bring together a citizens' assembly, like we have previously, which have led to incredible changes across all of our nations as well.

I'm just trying to read through the different points that people made here.

I don't think you'd want to be our age, to be honest.

Lord Dubs:

Yes, I would.

Jamie Moore:

I say that because we're not worried about tomorrow, we're worried about now. One of the things I took away from the past year working in Ireland and at the United Nations is I am more nervous than ever about our present and where we're going as a society. I really mean that, this is not me being sensationalist. I'm a public servant during the day and we keep our opinions very closely balanced.

But, young people are nervous now. We are afraid for ourselves because climate action isn't about tomorrow, it's about today. We're more than willing to work with anybody who is happy to work on that with us. I think that's it from me now.

Valery Molay:

Thank you so much for all your contributions. Like Jamie, I do agree with most comments that have been put forward especially in terms of how do we work together. I think, like we said at the beginning of our speech, when I said that my choice to participate in Young Voices was because it was a platform, for once they told me that I didn't just have to speak but I had to work together with the politicians. The emphasis here is about working together and coming up with solutions. We've seen it happen, and I've seen it is possible to do it together. Like Youth Check, it's not something that young people came up with and tried without the politicians. We worked together with the Department of Youth Affairs together to come up with it. So, it is possible for us to work together.

One of the amazing things that we heard from the civil servant while we were working on this is that it was great to work together because we pushed the boundaries and they brought us to reality which is what we need. You guys have the wisdom. You've been in the work but, again, we're talking about that complacency while I'm more inclined to say, "Yes, what about if we tried just a little bit hard here", and that's why it is important for all of us to come together and work.

I think partnership is important but, unfortunately, most of the time for young people it feels like we're just seen as — again, tokenism. We attend events. We talk, people tell us they hear us, you're doing great but, then, we leave and nothing happens, and that also stops young people from accepting any partnership any more. The last time I was there I did speak, but I didn't get anything in return. So, as much as you guys are asking us to partner, you have to live up to that idea when you get the young person in and they have spent their time — they have given their time and energy to tell you what they think should work — we should also see some action. Why should I come back if every time I try to speak I'm just told that it's great but, then, I walk out and nothing happens? Why should I come back? Nobody will do that in their everyday life.

I like the idea of a manifesto. I wish all young people could come together and have one manifesto. I have my own, and I'm using it for preparing myself for election. I think all of us are doing that.

In terms of what action would we like to see because we can't solve everything — and this will answer the question about why, probably, the Taoiseach got a backlash is because when he comes out and talks about beef — which is great, it is true that if we reduced our amount of beef it would make a big change — but coming from the Taoiseach we are expecting something bigger. He could talk to us about fossil fuels — like reducing or banishing fossil fuels and moving onto something that will open up the innovation or the research, the technology that we need. Where the money will actually go back to something that will actually help society overall.

That's why he will get the backlash. I don't think anybody do really agree that eating less meat is bad, but we just want it more, unfortunately. And I'm vegetarian again, so that's really — my last word here would be I want everyone to remember that, as a young person, I never want a politician to solve my problem, and I don't think you guys are capable of solving society's problem. Any issues that we have in society needs to be dealt in society.

Again, all we ask is for the structures to be put in place. All we ask is for the right policies that are there that force us or put us in the right path. Today, if I am going to stop using my car, I need to have better public transport. So you're not giving me the solution, but you're giving me the structure to allow me to make the right decision that will make about the change. So we're not asking complete change; we're asking for the elements that will lead to those changes, which will only come from society itself — not you guys, society as a whole, which includes you in it. So my last word here is for everyone to remember that we're all working together, and I just need the element of structure, and we'll take it from there. Thank you.

Saoi O'Connor:

I think when we say things like, 'Oh, your demands — the school strikers' demands — are not specific enough', I think it's important. Yes, definitely we need to work on specifics, and we need to work on building partnerships so that we can come up with concrete plans of action and strategy together. And I think that is very important; that's part of the work of the National Youth Council. Youth participation is very important, but it's also important to remember that young people felt that we needed to take to the streets and strike from school to protest this, because in those spaces where we were given that platform, we were being heard but we weren't being listened to. So I think, like Valery said, we need to be improving those spaces so that that partnership between young people and policymakers and decision-makers is real and both sides are values.

I'm in an unusual position here, because there are politicians talking to me and I agree with a lot of what they're saying. I don't find myself in that position a lot, so I'm not quite sure what to do here. I'm a bit lost. But I think while, yes, the young people must be involved in all decision-making processes, and, like Valery said, the whole of the society, it is also important that the responsibility isn't placed on the young people, because we are protesting, entirely. Yes, we want action. We want to be protected. But also it's not our job to come up with the solutions by ourselves. We shouldn't have to come up with those strategies. It's bad enough that we had to take to the streets in our millions over the world so that these things would start to change. So yes, we need partnerships, but we also need the young people to be listened to as well as heard. Thank you.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Right, so thank you very much for all the contributions today. It's greatly appreciated, so can I ask everyone to give their thanks — *[Applause.]* — to the National Youth Council of Ireland. They have certainly given us a huge amount to reflect upon this morning, so thank you very much indeed. So I'd now like to hand over to Seán, the Co-Chair, to lead the final session of the day.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

OK. Business is now concluded and, on behalf of you all, I would like to thank our speakers, our secretariat, and I would particularly like to mention the valuable work done by Veronica Carr and Dervila Flynn, supported by the rest of the team from the Houses of the Oireachtas. The staff of Druid's Glen, and everyone else who helped to make this 50th plenary session such a successful event, including yourselves. A number of us were talking about the attendance during the plenary itself, the contributions, and I think it was very, very, very worthwhile, and I really look forward to the next plenary. So I might call on Andrew, if he wants to say a few words.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Andrew Rosindell MP):

Thank you very much. I think we'll agree this has been a really worthwhile couple of days. It's been wonderful to be here in Wicklow. We've been looked after and hosted incredibly well. We thank everybody for their hard work in making this possible, and we particularly look forward to welcoming everybody to the UK in the autumn for our next plenary session, which will take place in Warwickshire, and return the hospitality that we've been given here in Wicklow. So, Seán and your team — everybody — thank you very much indeed.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

OK, I now call on Al Brouard to move the Adjournment motion.

Deputy Al Brouard:

Thank you. Before I propose the Adjournment, I would very much like to offer a few thank yous on behalf of Members. Firstly, to our Irish hosts for inviting us to this beautiful county of Wicklow and the amazing venue here at Druids Glen Hotel. We have been so well looked after not only by the hotel but our hosts, not as guests but as friends. The evening gala dinner at Powerscourt Estate was a great opportunity to renew these friendships and make new ones. It was a superb setting, and, again, we were so well looked after by our Irish hosts, which gives me the opportunity to thank a very interesting talk from Simon Coveney, Foreign Minister, and a thanks to all the speakers who have given up their time to address and help us.

Journeys need to be planned, and we have been so grateful to Veronica Carr and Dervila Flynn and all our support staff for getting us at the right place at the right time for us to do the right thing. And, on that last point, our days are precious. When we work together and understand each other, we can achieve so much more.

Finally, our thanks to the Co-Chairs, Andrew Rosindell MP and Seán Crowe TD, who have guided us so well and with good humour. Thank you, and I look forward to welcoming the steering committee to the island of Guernsey in September. It's near Jersey, but it's slightly different. *[Laughter.]* Please travel safe. Thank you. Friends, I propose the adjournment of the 58th British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Seán Crowe TD):

Thanks, Al. I now declare the 58th plenary session of the Assembly closed, and we'll next meet in plenary session in the Forest of Arden.

Adjourned at 12.08 pm.