

CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

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Northern Ireland
Assembly

Monday 5 December 2016

Lough Foyle/Carlingford Lough

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the current ownership of both Lough Foyle and Carlingford lough.

Miss McIlveen: Last week, responding to a parliamentary question about fishing rights in Lough Foyle and Carlingford lough after the UK leaves the EU, the Secretary of State restated the UK's position that the whole of Lough Foyle is within the UK. The issue of ownership of both loughs is not a matter within the competence of the Assembly. However, I know that the Irish Government, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Crown Estate have been talking about the issue for some time. I understand that the next meeting between the two Governments is scheduled for later this month in Dublin.

My immediate concern is that the ongoing dispute is impacting the ability of the Loughs Agency to effectively manage aquaculture activities, particularly licensing in Lough Foyle, and I am, therefore, anxious that it be resolved. For that reason, during my first North/South Ministerial Council meeting in September, there was a discussion on how the ongoing dispute is adversely affecting the operational activities of the Loughs Agency. The pressing priority for all those involved in the discussions should be to come to an arrangement that will allow the Loughs Agency to fulfil its role properly.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Minister for her answer. I listened to what she said, and she related that the situation is causing difficulties with aquaculture licensing. To what extent is she or her Department being kept abreast of what is happening? Surely the hiatus is causing problems for the sensible running of her Department in relation to what we are speaking about.

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. As he highlighted, this has been going on for quite some time. In fact, it dates back to 1662 and the charter of Charles II, in which he granted the waters in the bed and the fisheries of Lough Foyle to the Irish Society and included them as part of County Londonderry. As you are aware, the lough is the responsibility of the Loughs Agency. There is

a claim by the Irish Government by virtue of the fact that they have not accepted the position of the United Kingdom, which is obviously causing ongoing problems, not only with aquaculture licensing in Lough Foyle but with any future management that we would like to put in place, particularly for Lough Foyle and Carlingford lough. The situation is ongoing, and we want it resolved as soon as possible

Source: <http://data.niassembly.gov.uk/HansardXml/plenary-05-12-2016.pdf>



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Timmy Dooney asked the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources the immediate contingency steps he will take to safeguard security of energy supply here following the decision by UK voters to leave the EU in its recent referendum and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Denis Naughten: Substantial work has been and continues to be undertaken across Government to identify the key strategic, policy and operational risks following the outcome of the referendum on EU membership in the UK in June. A Cabinet committee chaired by An Taoiseach, of which I am a member, has been set up to consider all potential contingency planning issues arising for Ireland from the referendum result. My Department sits on a number of interdepartmental groups that ensure a whole-of-Government approach to this important matter.

Energy is a priority sector for the Government in considering the impacts of Brexit. The energy systems of Ireland and the UK are interdependent with a large amount of Ireland's energy supply being imported from the UK and a single electricity market in operation across the island of Ireland. The key priorities for me are the continuation of the current Ireland-UK energy relationship, particularly with regard to secure trade of gas and oil and the continued operation and development of the single electricity market. There is excellent co-operation between the UK and Ireland on security of energy supply and all avenues will be pursued bilaterally with the EU and at EU level to ensure this remains the case.

As the House is no doubt aware, the EU has made the decision not to negotiate on any issues relating to Brexit until after Article 50 has been invoked. However, while attending meetings, such as the Energy Council, from which I have just returned, I seek out discussions with Ministers from other

member states. Through these meetings, I raise awareness of how Ireland may be impacted by Brexit and what are our key concerns.

At the recent North-South Ministerial Council, I had a bilateral meeting with Simon Hamilton MLA, the Minister for the Economy in Northern Ireland, where we discussed energy issues relevant to both Ireland and Northern Ireland. My officials continue to work closely with their counterparts in Northern Ireland, the UK and other EU member states on energy matters.

Timmy Dooney: While the Single European Market is not under any serious threat as a result of Brexit, the integrated single European project likely is. As of now the SEM is undergoing significant upgrades in order to comply with the EU regulations the Minister has identified. Obviously, Britain's departure could seriously jeopardise this project and it is unclear whether the UK will receive EU funding to aid this transition. It is also unclear as to whether this will remain an attractive option for the UK following its departure. It throws our participation in that into jeopardy. It would be important for the Minister to engage with the various stakeholders at the earliest opportunity in order to give some confidence to that sector. The concerns transcend just the price concerns. Currently Ireland relies on EU regulatory measures to address shocks in the supply of oil and gas. If the UK energy market became independent of the EU, Ireland would lose access to a portion of its 90-day emergency reserve that is stored in the UK.

Denis Naughten: There is huge connectivity in energy supply on both islands. About 50% of all the oil we consume and all of the natural gas last year came from the UK. We have the single electricity market. My priority and that of my Department is to ensure the continuation of trade in secure supplies of energy with the UK. In that context at yesterday's European Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council I raised the issue of gas supply. At the moment we are looking at issues such as regional co-operation - the region we have is between Ireland and the UK. We are very conscious that the UK may be outside our region. We believe that there should be flexibility such that that region remains intact.

We are exploring other options, including the Celtic interconnector. President Hollande was in Ireland recently and an agreement was signed between Réseau de Transport d'Électricité, RTE, in France and EirGrid here about developing that project. We are considering the possibility of an LNG terminal in Shannon so that we are not dependent on all our energy supplies coming from one source.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/debates/?id=2016-12-06a.247&s=north-south#g251>