



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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Smoky coal ban to be extended across country

A State-wide ban on the sale and use of bituminous or "smoky" coal is expected to be announced by Minister for the Environment Alan Kelly on Monday.

The initiative is due to be revealed at a clean-air conference organised to mark the 25th anniversary of the ban on the sale of smoky coal in Dublin.

The ban was introduced in the capital in September 1990 after several years of severe winter smog resulting from the use of coal for home heating.

The ban, introduced by then minister of state for environment Mary Harney, significantly reduced smoke and sulphur dioxide levels and improved public health, particularly for those with cardiac or respiratory conditions such as asthma.

It was extended to Cork city in 1995 and is currently in force in 26 urban areas, including all towns with a population greater than 15,000. Researchers have estimated 8,200 lives have been saved as a result.

The regulations have been under review since 2012 and extension of the prohibition to towns with a population of more than 7,000 was under consideration.

However, Mr Kelly is understood not to be in favour of a piecemeal approach. "Monitoring by the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] has shown that air quality is poorer in towns where the smoky coal ban does not apply, although there is evidence that smaller smoky coal ban areas tend to be less effective," he said.

He said it was also recognised that having different regulations between urban and rural locations was "not ideal, as it results in different levels of environmental protection and clean air benefits for citizens in different locations".

An **all-island** ban is also under consideration. A final report is expected to be presented to the **North South** Ministerial Council later this year. However, the impasse in the North is expected to delay agreement.

Source: Irish Times

27 September 2015

Ex-PSNI chief backs Border force

A FORMER chief constable of the Northern Ireland police force has come out in favour of a **cross-Border** task force to tackle the multi-million euro crime empire controlled by the IRA.

Sir Ronnie Flanagan was in Dublin last week speaking on behalf of the tobacco industry which reckons cigarette and tobacco smuggling is costing the Irish State between (EURO)250m and (EURO)500m per annum and the British Exchequer an estimated £2bn ((EURO)2.7bn) annually.

After years of organised IRA crime along the Border with diesel and tobacco smuggling as its main income source, Flanagan, who also served as the chief inspector of policing in the UK, has come out in support of the proposal for a joint task force to tackle the massive illicit trade centred on south Armagh. Flanagan told the Sunday Independent: "The Irish Exchequer is afflicted, in my estimation, by an annual loss to the Treasury of a quarter of a billion euros at least on cigarettes and the British Exchequer by a loss of £2bn from this illicit trade.

"Ironically, in terms of ex-penditure, the loss to the British Exchequer is the same as it costs to run the London Metropolitan Police force and when you think of how that expenditure in both countries could be spent on hospitals and schools - that is being lost.

"I have read the Assembly (British Irish Parliamentary Assembly) report and I believe it is a good report. I think it was well researched and thought out. There are views that we don't need an extra layer of bureaucracy, but in my experience this type of mechanism or provision, a joint task force, can be implemented and made to work or we should ensure that what mechanisms exist, could be enhanced."

The proposal for a joint task force of police and customs on both sides of the Border was made earlier this year by the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly after its members visited south Armagh and witnessed the open diesel laundering and smuggling operations. It is understood the proposal is supported by the Government though the British are said to be less enthusiastic.

On Friday morning gardaí mounted the first of what are expected to be a series of major operations along the Border to counter the huge smuggling trade which is costing the Irish Exchequer up to a billion euros a year.

Gardaí are also investigating alleged threats to the family of a young woman who is believed to have gone missing after a large amount of money - said to be in the region of (EURO)450,000 in cash - went missing from one of the Provos' money laundering operations. Garda sources say the IRA crime empire extends to a wide variety of crime from money laundering to smuggling, counterfeiting, human trafficking and cattle rustling.

The task force issue was the subject of a debate in the Seanad last Wednesday night during which Minister for Foreign Affairs Charlie Flanagan said the gardaí and PSNI were now in close liaison over assessing the involvement or otherwise of 'former' terrorists and criminality.

During the debate, Fine Gael Senator Paul Coghlan, who was one of the joint Parliamentary Assembly team that visited south Armagh, reiterated his calls for a joint **cross-Border** body.

The Senator said: "It is 18 years since the introduction of the Good Friday Agreement and the area to which I refer is still commonly referred to as bandit country. In a democratic society, this is not normal or right. We need a **North-South** corridor along the Border where the Garda and police districts in the North could co-operate. We should allow a kind of joint authority where they can criss-**cross the Border** and investigate crime. They co-operate excellently, by the way. That to which I refer could be effective.

"There is a support factor and a fear factor operating, particularly in Armagh. Perhaps our gardaí would be more acceptable there. The police are not around the streets up there. The last two policemen who lived in that community were murdered. I think provision could be made for a **North-South** corridor along the Border, just for the operational districts."

Source: Sunday Independent