



The Centre for  
Cross Border Studies

## MEDIA WATCH

---

02/09/2015 - 09/10/2015

3 October 2015

### Criminal groups still 'a threat to peace' - Minister

JUSTICE Minister Frances Fitzgerald has revealed criminal groups still represent a "severe threat" to the peace process in Northern Ireland.

But she insisted huge strides have been made to tackle paramilitary involvement in organised crime.

Following a meeting with Garda Commissioner Noirin O'Sullivan this week, she said a "number of enquiries are going on" **north and south** of the Border.

"What we do know is that there is still a severe threat in the North," she said "We do face a threat to the peace process in an ongoing way from dissident groups.

"We also have people involved in criminal activity, who were previously members of the Provisional IRA.

"So we have serious issues, but be clear about one thing, no blind eye is being turned on anyone. We have ongoing prosecutions in relation to **cross-border** crime.

"There has also been quite a number of successes in joint operations between the PSNI and An Garda Síochána."

Speaking to the Irish Independent, she said it is "desperately distressing" that Chris Harper-Mercer, who murdered at least 10 people at a college in Oregon in the US on Thursday, was seemingly influenced by certain IRA-related images.

English-born Harper-Mercer, who opened fire at Umpqua Community College, had an 'Ireland Freedom Fighters' album on his MySpace page. Among his social media profiles was other content linked to the IRA.

Minister Fitzgerald said "radical groups" will always attract followers.

"This is why we have to crack down hard. When you have a culture of violence in any country, it can be used as an excuse. It radicalises people. It means we have to continually work for peace," she added.

Referring to domestic politics, she played down suggestions of a snap election in November - but conceded the Coalition parties are firmly in election mode.

"It's fair to say both parties have been making preparations and are well advanced. As the Taoiseach has consistently stated, the election will be next year," she said.

The minister was speaking yesterday at the Government's launch of a new 'six-point plan' to create more jobs for those with disabilities.

The "comprehensive employment strategy" was launched in Farmleigh House by the Taoiseach Enda Kenny.

**Source: Irish Independent**

**6 October 2015**

## Revenue and Gardai close in on cattle rustling gang; Revenue and gardai target cattle rustlers

GARDAI have identified the key members of a cattle rustling gang believed to be responsible for the majority of livestock thefts in the Border region over the past three years.

The highly organised gang of criminals is known to be operating on both sides of the Border and has links to legitimate businesses to help offload their stolen haul.

The alleged ringleader of the rustling outfit is a farmer with several properties **north and south** and he is the prime target for several agencies involved in tracking down the thieves and their associates.

Department of Agriculture officials have already hit the rustling boss financially and are understood to have stopped the payment of subsidies to him as a result of inquiries into suspected irregularities.

The alleged rustler has key associates based in counties Monaghan and Donegal while some of the gang are also based in Tyrone.

The **cross-border** dimension to their activities led to the setting up of a special investigation task force that includes the Garda, PSNI, Revenue and Customs here and their counterparts in Northern Ireland, as well as the Departments of Agriculture and the Food Safety Authority in both jurisdictions.

Revenue officials are currently carrying out an audit of the prime suspect's financial affairs while officers from the Criminal Assets Bureau are keeping a close watch on developments in those inquiries.

Task force inquiries have stretched from counties Cavan and Monaghan to Donegal and included Roscommon and Longford while also extending northwards to Tyrone and Armagh.

The gang is believed to be connected to a legitimate meat supplier to help dispose of the animals and to a licensed haulier to organise transportation after the thefts.

Abattoirs Investigators have also uncovered the use of illegal abattoirs and butchering operations.

One officer told the Farming Independent: "This gang has a particularly streamlined operation and can steal cattle and sheep in one area at night and then dispose of the animals in another district by lunchtime the following day.

"There is also evidence that the stolen animals are being moved between farms in the two jurisdictions and inquiries are ongoing into the use of stolen tags and false documentation," he added.

In one raid, gardai and Department officials found 35 cattle with illegal tags while 21 animals with tag irregularities were discovered in another search.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6 CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1 Around 150 cattle and 120 sheep have been rustled in the Cavan-Monaghan area in the last two years.

Other counties near the Border have also been hit badly but the highest figures for rustling have emerged on the northern side for the past five years.

Gardai say that some of those behind the rustling are also involved in **cross-Border** smuggling and fuel laundering, while a small group of them have been identified as key players in the theft of beer kegs from pubs and their subsequent sale for smelting.

Meanwhile, officers are working closely with groups like the Irish Farmers Association and Muintir na Tire to encourage farmers maintain a high level of vigilance in their areas and promote the development of schemes such as text alert, which currently involves more than 120,000 subscribers with an estimated 200,000 text messages being sent each month. Crimestoppers has also called on anyone with information to contact its confidential telephone line, 1800 250025. Tip-offs can be supplied anonymously to the service.

Intelligence about the rustling gangs is also being fed into the national intelligence and analysis-led operation, known as Fiacla.

**Source:** Irish Independent

6 October 2015

## **CBI wants tuition fees to rise in plan to grow economy**

Businesses are calling for an increase in university tuition fees to at least £6,000 a year as part of a comprehensive 12-point plan aimed at growing Northern Ireland's economy.

The CBI in Northern Ireland is pushing for a raft of key changes, including lowering the rate of corporation tax, remaining in the EU, creating a strong Programme for Government, expanding our roads network and delivering the long-delayed **North-South** interconnector.

And more controversially, the CBI is keen to see university tuition fees increase to at least £6,000, along with proposals which would require students to study English and Maths up to the age of 18.

It comes after Colin Walsh, chairman of the CBI in Northern Ireland, blasted Stormont, and put pressure on politicians here to ensure the region doesn't return to direct rule.

And the new incoming chairman, former Titanic Quarter chief executive David Gavaghan, said Northern Ireland "needs political stability" to ensure the economy can grow.

"The question for us all is how do we get in the next cycle of the economic upturn.

"With the political instability in front of us, it's very difficult to do that," he said.

"I think we need political stability in order to ensure we have five years plus of growth ahead of us."

Outgoing chairman Colin Walsh said: "Once the political foundations are in place, a new economic vision is required.

"This new vision must recognise that Northern Ireland competes within a global marketplace for investment and talent, appreciates the value of investing in infrastructure, and above all, understands that tough economic choices cannot remain undecided forever."

CBI Northern Ireland director, Nigel Smyth said: "The next Executive has a historic opportunity to put in place far reaching measures that will close the economic gap with other regions and nations and deliver the prosperity that Northern Ireland so desperately needs."

Mr Smyth said there had been a "lack of ambition" in Northern Ireland's last Programme for Government.

Meanwhile, according to the CBI, a straw poll of around a dozen of its members showed 100% support for remaining in the EU.

The CBI's new plan includes other areas of focus for what it hopes will be a renewed and reinvigorated Executive next year, if our political leaders can sort out their differences amid the ongoing talks process. It wants "clear timescales" for major road works such as the A5 and A6 upgrades.

The CBI also wants a new "procurement and delivery agency", to make planning more straightforward in order to attract business and reform Northern Ireland's public sector.

Just a few days ago, outgoing chairman Colin Walsh pulled no punches when criticising Stormont during the business group's 50th anniversary event at the Culloden Hotel outside Belfast.

He said politicians "need to earn the respect of the public again". He added that "we need to see an end to old divisions, the melodramas, and the brinkmanship".

**Source:** Belfast Telegraph