



The Centre for  
Cross Border Studies

## MEDIA WATCH

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### Paramilitary gangs profit from illegal dumping of waste

PARAMILITARY groups may be involved in the **cross-border** disposal of illegal waste, MLAs have been warned.

Criminal Justice Inspection chiefs told the environment committee the dumping of waste - which can earn high profits - was more organised than initially believed.

Their warning came after a report earlier this year found the regulation of waste here is highly vulnerable to criminality but that at present the punishment does not 'fit the crime'.

Yesterday CJI chief inspector Brendan McGuigan said environmental crime is among "some of the most serious crime going on here".

Criminals and unscrupulous operators are making significant profits from illegal waste disposal and "going to extreme lengths, including violence, to ensure their criminal enterprises deliver the maximum return," he said.

There used to be a perception that **cross-border** dumping often involved landowners or someone with control and access to land "trying to make some quick money out of it".

But, responding to questions from the SDLP's Alban Maginness, he said CJI had learned that operations are more organised and criminals are constantly thinking how they can thwart new systems and rules.

Mr Maginness (left) said it was "a public scandal" that illegal waste dumping has "allowed people to reap huge benefits, in terms of money, and destroy our environment at the same time".

Environmental crime had "gone on for a number of years" and he believed a "lack of linkage" between environmental groups had contributed to the problem.

Deputy chief inspector James Corrigan said he "couldn't rule out paramilitary involvement" in illegal waste disposal.

"The sanctions aren't effective enough to deal with the profits... anyone that wants to make profits and have a relatively low chance of being prosecuted, this is an area they will obviously look at," he added.

CJI wants to see "a strategic assessment of the waste sector" and partnership model alongside the National Crime Agency to help secure more convictions and lead to the confiscation of assets.

Their appearance yesterday came after CJI NI recommended the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) develop a 'more rigorous' approach to dealing with offenders involved in waste crime following the report by Chris Mills, a former director of the Welsh Environment Agency.

**Source:** Belfast Telegraph

## Republic regularly using ambulances from Northern Ireland for 999 calls

Ambulances from Northern Ireland are "regularly" being used to assist 999 calls in the Republic sparking concerns services are being "stretched to the limit", it has been claimed.

A Sinn Fein councillor has claimed that on one recent occasion ambulances from Northern Ireland were requested to deal with five incidents in Louth in one day.

A cross-border protocol exists between Northern Ireland and the Republic for the two services to support each other during major emergencies and provide "mutual aid".

But concerns have been raised that a shortage of ambulances in the south has led to the Republic "begging" the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) to respond to more calls.

The National Ambulance Service (NAS) in the south has said that "it is not possible to state how many times NI Ambulance Service were requested to assist NAS".

But Louth councillor Tomas Sharkey said he believed there has been a "spike" in the number of calls made in recent weeks for Northern Ireland crews - in particular from the Dundalk area.

"We are begging off the Northern system who are being generous, but it is at the risk of the northern system being overstretched," the Sinn Fein councillor said.

"I am aware of a situation two weeks ago when the northern ambulance service were contacted on five occasions in the one day to come to Co Louth.

"A couple of years ago it was only when an escalated scenario happened - a serious car crash or major incident."

Mr Sharkey said that he did not know whether the calls were Category A - where there is, potentially, an immediate threat to life.

Former Health Minister Michael McGimpsey said he was worried the increasing use of cross-border ambulances could lead to escalating pressures on already stressed crews across Northern Ireland.

"We have a protocol that we support cross-border when there are major emergencies, but it wasn't designed to be a regular service because clearly our service is under extreme pressure. I would be concerned the resources are not going into the service to meet our own obligations in Northern Ireland let alone the Republic of Ireland," he said.

Figures from the NIAS reveal that in the last financial year - until April this year - crews responded to a total of 178,350 emergency calls of which 93 (0.05%) were to the Republic.

A further breakdown revealed 66 were in Donegal, 14 in Louth, six in Monaghan, five in Cavan and two in Leitrim.

It is unclear though how many calls have been made in recent weeks since April 2015.

The NIAS said that although major incidents are an "exception" to the daily running of the service, when they occur they can put "a significant strain on the resources of the service which has the responsibility to manage the incident".

In an NIAS statement, John McPoland explained there are two Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) which outlines the level of "mutual aid" that can be provided between the services.

He said: "As part of contingency planning to ensure that patients, particularly in the border areas, receive the quickest response to provide the highest levels of clinical care at their time of need, the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service and the HSE National Ambulance Service developed a MOU that would enable both services to work within their own procedures and clinical practice guidelines in the other's area of operation."

Mr McPoland said that major incidents are exceptions to the normal day-to-day business of the ambulance service.

"However, when they do occur they can put a significant strain on the resources of the service which has the responsibility to manage the incident," he added.

"In recent years, the major incidents include the fire at a ward block in Altnagelvin and the flooding of the Emergency Department at Letterkenny General Hospital. On these occasions the services were only too glad of the offers of help from their counterparts across the border."

**Source:** Belfast Telegraph

**16 November 2015**

## **PSNI AND GARDA CHIEFS BACK 'BORDER CORRIDOR' OF CO-OPERATION**

A "border corridor" of closer co-operation could be established between police forces north and south, senior officers said.

New accountability arrangements and legislation would need to be drawn up, PSNI chief constable George Hamilton said.

Garda Commissioner Noirin O'Sullivan also supported efforts to improve policing along the border after the killing of gardai Adrian Donohoe and Tony Golden in recent years.

Fuel launderers and cigarette smugglers have plied the area for decades.

Mr Hamilton said: "Anything that can be offered to add to the toolbox is welcome but there needs to be a practical and pragmatic outworking of that."

He told a meeting of British and Irish politicians from the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA) in Cheltenham that his force had stringent accountability mechanisms.

The senior officer referred to the dispute over accountability which delayed the work of the National Crime Agency (NCA) in Northern Ireland.

He added: ``The corridor itself in principle sounds like a sensible idea but in pragmatic, practical terms there are issues around legislation and accountability.

``If you lawmakers can sort it out between yourselves that is great, it is not really a matter for policing. There are policy and legislative issues that would have to be addressed."

He said police numbers were under pressure.

``We need to do things differently in order to maintain the ground we have taken in public confidence over the last decade or so."

The number of border area fuel laundering plants and filling stations selling illicit fuel is alarming, a previous report from cross-border political body BIPA said.

Garda Commissioner Noirin O'Sullivan supported her Northern Ireland counterpart.

She said: ``Co-operation in the border corridor helps, anything that can help enhance co-operation must be helpful."

She said it should be focused and co-ordinated and pointed out that each force was accountable to justice ministers.

Mr Hamilton's comments earlier this year about the Provisional IRA following a killing by members of the group sparked near-collapse of the Assembly.

He said: ``The assessment of paramilitary groups cannot be allowed to become a distraction. As police services we target the crime not the badge that those involved in it claim to wear or claim to have worn in the past.

``It is individual members that present an ongoing threat, not the groups as a whole."

**Source:** Belfast Telegraph

**18 November 2015**

## Governments set up joint taskforce to tackle Border crime

The Irish and British governments have set up a high-level multiagency taskforce to deal with organised crime and **cross-Border** criminality and smuggling.

For the first time, a large number of agencies including police forces, revenue services and criminal assets bureaus from both sides of the Border will work alongside each other to clamp down on what has become a dominant political issue in both jurisdictions.

To underscore its importance, a trilateral **cross-Border** ministerial meeting will take place in early December involving the British government, the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive.

The key political participants will be Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Theresa Villiers, Minister for Justice Frances Fitzgerald and Northern Ireland Minister for Justice David Ford.

The meeting will agree specific measures to improve co-operation in tackling organised crime and criminality.

## **Cooperation**

The taskforce has already been set up and includes a strategic oversight group - identifying priority areas and targets - and an operations co-ordination group. It will report on its progress to the three responsible ministers on a six-monthly basis.

Minister for Foreign Affairs Charlie Flanagan said there already had been a lot of co-operation between the PSNI and the Garda Síochána.

"That relationship is to be further intensified and expanded to include revenue and criminal assets bureaus **North and South**. This is a clear desire on the part of the people that the issue of **cross-Border** crime and **all-island** crime be tackled in a way that has not taken place in the past," he said.

"We are working towards a new and deep relationship, the details of which will be announced by Frances Fitzgerald and [Mr Ford] at the earliest convenience."

The two police services have already operated the joint **Cross Border** Policing Strategy, while the **Cross Border** Organised Crime Threat Assessment is regularly updated.

The 2014 assessment, for example, emphasised fuel fraud and tobacco fraud as a "serious concern" for authorities in both jurisdictions.

The high-level taskforce will comprise the Garda Síochána, the PSNI, customs authorities from both jurisdictions, along with the Criminal Assets Bureau and the UK National Crime Agency.

**Cross-Border** fuel-smuggling has been a major issue for many years. Revenue closed down 35 fuel "laundries" from 2010-2014.

In 2014 alone, there were 1,109 detections of marked fuel oil and two oil laundries were detected resulting in 50,340 litres of oil being seized.

## **Funding**

In 2014, 5,852 seizures of cigarettes were made, resulting in the seizure of 53 million cigarettes with a value of EUR 25.5 million. In addition, 1,014 seizures of tobacco were made, resulting in the seizure of 9,836 kilogrammes of tobacco with a value of EUR 4.2 million.

While Ms Villiers said almost £300 million would be allowed for ending paramilitarism and tackling continuing dissident and organised crime activity, Mr Flanagan would not disclose the extent of extra funding that would be made available by the Government.

The initiative announced yesterday has come after a report by the British-Irish Parliamentary Association called for more serious penalties for illicit trade activities such as smuggling and fuel-laundering.

Lead author of the report Senator Paul Coughlan said at the time: "Illicit **cross-Border** trade, particularly in fuel and cigarette-smuggling, is a huge issue impacting on the lives of citizens and small businesses on both sides of the Border."

**Source:** The Irish Times