

Oireachtas Update



The Seanad is meeting today, December 22nd, to discuss the Water Services Bill 2014. The adjournment of these activities will also signify the adjournment of the Seanad for its Christmas break. The date on which it will next meet is still to be confirmed.

The Dáil will meet at 11am on Tuesday the 23rd of December to decide on the Water Services Bill 2014, including amendments from the Seanad, the report and final stages. This will conclude at 1pm, coinciding with the adjournment of the Dáil until 2.30pm on the 14th of January 2015.

There will be no Parliamentary Committee Meetings this week, with these already having been adjourned until January 2015.

Banking Inquiry hears from first witnesses

The Oireachtas Banking Inquiry, which began its first public meetings last Wednesday December 17th, has already heard from Finnish financial expert Peter Nyberg and former Canadian Secretary General of Finance, Rob Wright.

Nyberg, who conducted a previous official investigation into the affair as outlined in the 2011 172-page report *Misjudging Risk*, has told the inquiry that he did not believe anything fresh would be learned compared to what his team found three years ago. He told the inquiry that the crisis was essentially homegrown, since no external source forced Irish banks to grow or households to invest and borrow. He said the responsibility for the mistakes lay with directors, with senior and junior staff in the banks. He added that borrowers were also responsible for debt. Rob Wright's report *Strengthening the Capacity of the Department of Finance*, commissioned in 2010 by then Minister for Finance Brian Lenihan, identified the key reasons for the failure of Ireland's fiscal policy. Mr Wright told the Committee that had he been in the department he would have "pressed the red button" in 2005 or 2006.

So far the European Central Bank has said that it will not be in a position to take part in the inquiry since it is an individual inquiry conducted by a national parliament. Committee chairman Ciaran Lynch TD has indicated he will be contacting the ECB to ask for a review of its decision.

The first phase of the inquiry will hear from 30 witnesses who will set the context for the financial crash. The second phase, set to begin in April, will hear from bankers, civil servants, politicians and regulators. A dedicated website has been set up to provide information on the inquiry: <http://inquiries.oireachtas.ie/banking/>

Emergency Department Taskforce to convene for first time

Today, Monday December 22nd, the Emergency Department Task Force will convene for the first time in Dr. Steevens' Hospital. Its aim is to devise long-term solutions to overcrowding. The meeting will be chaired by Dr. Tony O'Connell, HSE National Director of Acute Hospital Services. Minister for Health Leo Varadkar TD will attend as well as senior officials from the health service and unions.

Approval to draft legislation to lower age eligibility for election to office of President

Alan Kelly TD, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, last Tuesday December 16th, noted the decision at Cabinet to proceed with the drafting of a Constitution Amendment Bill. The new Bill will provide for the amendment of Article 12.4.1° of the Constitution to adjust the age at which a person would be eligible for election to the office of President of Ireland from 35 years to 21 years. 21 years old is already the age at which one is eligible for election to the Dáil, the Seanad and to the European Parliament.

It looks likely that there will be a number of referendums held in 2015. The Cabinet was advised that the referendums on same sex marriage and the presidential age may both be held early this May.

New legislation on collective bargaining approved by Government

Last Tuesday, December 16th, the Government confirmed that the cabinet had agreed a revised Heads of Bill on a collective bargaining law. This new law is expected to be enacted by mid-2015. Legislative provision will be made to provide a definition of what constitutes “collective bargaining”. It will also provide for new guidelines to help the Labour Court identify if internal bargaining bodies are genuinely independent of their employer, clarity in the process of Trade Unions advancing a claim under the Act, and policies and principles for the Labour Court to follow when assessing those workers’ terms and conditions.

Through their trade unions, workers will be able to obtain binding decisions from the Labour Court or the Circuit Court for improvements to their pay or their terms of employment if the employer does not comply with the new legislation. Non-compliance by an employer found by the Labour Court to have victimised an employee will be a criminal offence. In order to protect employees, interim relief will apply in the Circuit Court in circumstances where a dismissal is being challenged by a worker who believes he or she was victimised as a result of the Act being invoked.

Commenting on the legislation, Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation Richard Bruton said; ‘This legislation will mark the fulfilment of a commitment to make sure that Irish law is consistent with recent judgements of the European Court of Human Rights’. The Irish Congress for Trade Unions also welcomed the decision by Cabinet.

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The Need for More Value for Money: Read [here](#)

DAIL

Tuesday 23rd December

11.00 a.m.

Water Services Bill 2014

Minister for the Environment,
Community and Local Government

Amendments from the Seanad

Amendments to Amendments from
the Seanad

Report Stage

Final Stage

1.00 p.m.

Adjournment of the Dáil

Note - Order of the Dáil 18 December 2014:

- the Dáil on its rising today shall adjourn until 2.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 14 January 2015, unless the Water Services Bill 2014 is sent back to the Dáil with amendments made in the Seanad, in which event, the Dáil shall sit on Tuesday, 23 December 2014 at 11 a.m. and shall adjourn not later than 1 p.m.;

there shall be no Order of Business within the meaning of Standing Order 26 and accordingly, the only business to be transacted shall be as follows:

Water Services Bill 2014 – amendments from the Seanad, the proceedings on which shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at 1 p.m. and any amendments from the Seanad not disposed of shall be decided by one question which shall be put from the Chair, and which shall in relation to amendments to the Seanad amendments, include only those set down or accepted by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government;

and on the conclusion of proceedings on the amendments from the Seanad, the Dáil shall adjourn until 2.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 14 January 2015.

SEANAD

Monday 22nd December

12.00 noon

Water Services Bill 2014

(Minister for the Environment, Community
and Local Government)

Committee State (resumed, section 7)

Report Stage

Final Stage

Followed by: Adjournment of the Seanad

Note - Order of the Seanad 19 December 2014

That, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders relative to Public Business, the Seanad shall meet on Monday, 22nd December, 2014 at 12 noon and the following arrangements shall apply:

(1)

(a) Standing Orders 29 and 30 shall stand suspended;

(b) there shall be no Order of Business;

(c) subject to completion of Committee Stage, the business to be taken shall be confined to the Report and Fifth Stages of the Water Services Bill 2014 [Dáil].

(2) No other business shall be taken unless the Seanad shall otherwise order on motion made by the Leader of the House or such other Senator as he may authorise in that behalf.

Seanad Adjourned until

sine die (to be confirmed)

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