

Climate change legislation passed

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill 2015 successfully passed through both houses of the Oireachtas last week. It will now be referred to the President for signing, and will be passed into law shortly.

This is the first official legislation by an Irish Government to deal with the issue of climate change. Under the Bill, a National Expert Advisory Council on Climate Change will be established. It will be chaired by Prof. John Fitzgerald. It will also introduce National Mitigation plans every five years that will outline measures for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the country, and National Adaptation Frameworks every five years that will outline the ways in which different sectors and local authorities can adapt to the effects of Climate change.

This comes the same week as Irish officials attend COP21, the UN Climate Summit in Paris (running from 30 November to 11 December). As Oisín Coughlan of Friends of the Earth stated in his article earlier this year, he doesn't believe Ireland are on-track to meet our 2020 targets, despite already talking about our 2030 targets. He will be attending the summit with hopes of the Irish Government making commitments and keeping them.

Section 37 to be amended

In a joint effort between Labour Ministers and the Anti-Austerity Alliance, a Bill was passed through both Houses of the Oireachtas last week. The Bill, the Employment Equality (Amendment) Act 2015 seeks to amend the much-debated s.37 of the Employment Equality Act 1998.

Therein, religious order and institutions run by them were made exempt from the European Equalities Directive 2000. That is, where they felt that the ethos of their organisation could be threatened, they could express bias in the hiring and firing of staff. The legislation stated that such institutions—such as hospitals and schools—“shall not be taken to discriminate against a person [if] ... it takes action which is reasonably necessary to prevent an employee ... from undermining the religious ethos of the institution”.

Opponents of the legislation have said that this creates a loophole whereby employers can discriminate on the basis of membership to the LGBTQ community, and further, to those who do not strictly adhere to Christian beliefs. The Anti-Austerity Alliance, in a press release announcing the Amendment's passing, described the Chilling Effect the clause had on employment; this is somewhat akin to the US Military policy of “Don't Ask, Don't Tell”.

The new Amendment will stop religious-run institutions discriminating against staff based on a differing of beliefs.

Low Pay Commission seeking submissions

After the recommendations of the Low Pay Commission were taken into account for Budget 2016, the independent body is about to set to work on its new round of considerations.

On Friday, 4 December, Minister for Business and Employment, Ged Nash TD, opened the call for submissions from interested parties on the topics that the Commission will examine. These topics will be: sub-minima rates for young workers, preponderance of women on the minimum wage, and also a general review of the minimum wage.

While the LPC's recommendation to raise the National Minimum Wage by 50c, to €9.15/h, was accepted and written into Budget 2016 (coming in to effect on 1 January 2016), the Minister asserts that there should be on-going, annual reviews of the rate, to ensure that the lowest-paid members of society receive fair compensation. New issues—such as the preponderance of women on minimum wage and the reasons for this, and whether or not the levels of sub-minima pay for young workers are appropriate—will be investigated. Women represent the majority of people on the minimum wage. Depending on age and length of time in work, young workers can be paid between 10–30% below the Minimum wage. Therefore, these issues are key.

If you would like to make recommendations or submissions on these issues, the closing dates for submissions are: Friday, 8 January 2016 for Sub-minima rates and Friday, 11 March 2016 for review of the National Minimum Wage and for the reasons for the high volume of women on minimum wage.

Tenants given new rights under Bill

A Bill that aims to help the precarious position of tenants in the country has passed all stages in both Houses, and has been passed to the President to be signed in to law.

The Residential Tenancies Bill will provide sureties to both tenants and landlords. The following measures are supplied within:

- As previously outlined, rent prices will only come under review every two years. Anyone whose rent went up in 2015 will not have to face such a hike until 2017.
- The legislation also puts some responsibility on the landlord in telling their tenants about their rights.
- Deposit Protection will be introduced. The PRTB will now take deposits, with the consent of both parties, and repayment of such shall be dealt with by them. This will minimise the amount of disputes the PRTB sees regarding deposit retention.
- Statutory Declarations should now be supplied by landlords who wish to sell their house, or give it to a member of family. If this sale does not go through, the landlord can be liable.
- Rent arrears will now be dealt with in District Courts, not Circuit Courts, making it cheaper for landlords to bring cases about rent.
- Housing Assistance limits will be increased in some major cities.
- Tax breaks of 100% mortgage interest relief will be given to landlords who take in tenants on Housing Assistance Payments or rent supplements for a period greater than three years.

This week at Public Affairs Ireland

On the Blog

Ireland's social progress lags behind its economic growth

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This week in Dáil Éireann

Tuesday 08 Decemeber

2.00 p.m.
Questions (Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht)

3.15 p.m.
Leaders Questions

3.36 p.m.
Questions (Taoiseach)

4.36 p.m.
Order of Business

5.06 p.m.
Topical Issues

Mental Health (Amendment) Bill 2008 [Seanad] - All Stages (Department of Health) (to conclude at 8.30 pm if not previously concluded)

8.30 p.m.
Private Members Business - (Technical Group)

10.00 p.m.
Dáil Adjourns

Wednesday 09 December

9.30 a.m.
Questions (Minister for Education and Skills)

10.45 a.m.
Legal Services Regulation Bill 2011 - (Amendments from the Seanad) (Department of Justice and Equality)

12.00 noon
Leaders Questions

12.21 p.m.
Order of Business

Supplementary Estimates (back from committee) (to conclude after 20 minutes if not previously concluded) (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform)

1.11 p.m.
SOS (1 hour)

2.11 p.m.
Topical Issues

2.59 p.m.
Morning Business continued

8.30 p.m.
Private Members Business - (Technical Group)

10.00 p.m.
Dáil Adjourns

Thursday 10 December

9.30 a.m.
Questions (Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government)

10.45 a.m.
Legal Services Regulation Bill 2011 - (Amendments from the Seanad) (resumed) (Department of Justice and Equality) (to conclude at 2.15pm if not previously concluded)

Criminal Justice (Burglary of Dwellings) Bill 2015 - Order for Report, Report and Final Stages (Department of Justice and Equality) (to conclude after 2 hours if not previously concluded)

International Protection Bill 2015 [Seanad] - Second Stage (Department of Justice and Equality) (to conclude after 2 ½ hours if not previously concluded)

Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2015 [Seanad] - Second Stage (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government) (to conclude after 2 ½ hours if not previously concluded)

12.00 noon
Leaders Questions

12.21 p.m.
Order of Business

Morning Business Continued

2.15 p.m.
SOS (30 mins)

2.45 p.m.
Afternoon Business Continued

9.45 p.m.
Topical Issues

10.33 p.m.
Dáil Adjourns

Friday 11 December

10.00 a.m.
Finance (Tax Appeals) Bill 2015 - Order for Report, Report and Final Stages (Department of Finance) (to conclude after 2 ½ hours if not previously concluded)

Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) (No.2) Bill 2015 - All Stages (Department of Finance) (to conclude after 3 hours if not previously concluded)

3.30 p.m.
SOS (30 minutes)

Appropriation Bill 2015 - All Stages (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform) (to conclude within 65 minutes, if not previously concluded)

Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Bill 2015 - All Stages (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform) (to conclude after 2 hours if not previously concluded)

FOLLOWED BY PRIVATE MEMBERS BILLS

7.05 p.m.
Ramming of Garda Vehicles Bill 2015 - Deputy Brendan Griffin

Coroners Bill 2015 - Deputy Clare Daly

7.05 p.m.
Dáil Adjourns

This week in Seanad Éireann

Monday 07 December

1.00 p.m.
Prisons Bill 2015 – Order for Second Stage and Second Stage

Courts Bill 2015 – Order for Second Stage and Second Stage

International Protection Bill 2015 – Committee (resumed) and Remaining Stages
(Department of Justice and Equality)

Seanad Adjourns

Tuesday 08 December

10.30 a.m.
Commencement Matters

11.30 a.m.
Order of Business

12.45 p.m.
Harbours Bill 2015 – Second Stage
(Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport)

2.15 p.m.
Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) (No.2) Bill 2015 – All Stages
(Department of Finance)

3.45 p.m.
Social Welfare and Pensions Bill 2015 – Report and Final Stages
(Department of Social Protection)

5.15 p.m.
Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2015 – Committee and Remaining Stages
(Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government)

Seanad Adjourns

Wednesday 09 December

10.30 a.m.
Commencement Matters

11.30 a.m.
Order of Business

12.45 a.m.
Finance Bill 2015 – Committee Stage
(Department of Finance)

3.00 p.m.
Private Members Business – Gradam an Uachtaráin Bill 2015 Second Stage
(Senator Feargal Quinn)

5.00 p.m.
Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Bill 2013 - Committee Stage
(Department of Justice and Equality)

Seanad Adjourns

Thursday 10 December

10.30 a.m.
Commencement Matters

11.30 a.m.
Order of Business

Motion regarding the arrangements for the sitting of the House on Friday, 11 December and Tuesday, 15 December, 2015 – without debate

12.45 p.m.
Finance Bill 2015 – Report and Final Stages
(Department of Finance)

2.15 p.m.
Electoral Amendment Bill 2015 – All Stages

4.00 p.m.
Dublin Docklands Development Authority (Dissolution) Bill 2015 – All Stages
(Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government)

Seanad Adjourns

Friday 11 December

10.00 a.m.
Criminal Justice (Burglary of Dwellings) Bill 2015 – Second Stage

Prisons Bill 2015 – Committee and Remaining Stages

Courts Bill 2015 – Committee and Remaining Stages

Criminal Justice (Sexual Offences) Bill 2015 – Committee Stage
(Department of Justice and Equality)

Seanad Adjourns

This week's Committee Meetings

Tuesday 08 December

Education and Skills (Select sub)
CR1, LH 2000 1.30 p.m. (T)
AGENDA: 2015 Supplementary Estimates for Public Services - Vote 26 (Education and Skills) [Minister for Education and Skills]

Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Select)
CR2, LH 2000 1.30 p.m. (T)
AGENDA: Credit Guarantee (Amendment) Bill 2015 [Minister of State with special responsibility for Business and Employment]

Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Select)
CR3, LH 2000 2 p.m. (T)
AGENDA: 2015 Supplementary Estimates for Public Services - Vote 30 (Agriculture, Food and the Marine) [Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine]

Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht (Joint)
CR4, LH 2000 2.15 p.m. (T)
AGENDA: Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Housing (Regulation of Approved Housing Bodies) Bill 2015 [Ms. Rosalind Carroll, Head of Regulation, Housing Agency; and Mr. Barry O'Leary, Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Sean Cremin, Head of Treasury, Housing Finance Agency]

Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Joint)
CR3, LH 2000 3.15 p.m. (T)
AGENDA: (i) Pre-EU Council and the Sea Fisheries Sustainability Impact Assessment [Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine]; (ii) The Department's Six-monthly Report on Developments in the EU [Secretary General, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine]; and (iii) The Beef Data Genomics Program (resumed) [Officials from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine]

Health (Select sub)
CR1, LH 2000 4 p.m. (T)
AGENDA: 2015 Supplementary Estimates for Public Services - Vote 38 (Health) [Minister for Health]

Thursday 10 December

Health and Children (Joint)
CR2, LH 2000 9.30 a.m. (T)
AGENDA: Session A: 9.30 a.m.
Update on Children and Youth Issues [Minister for Children and Youth Affairs]; and
Session B: 11.15 a.m.
Update on the current work of TUSLA (Child and Family Agency) [Mr. Gordon Jeyes, Chief Executive, TUSLA]

Public Accounts
CR3, LH 2000 10 a.m. (T)
AGENDA: (i) Business of the Committee;
(ii) Waterford Institute of Technology Financial Statements 2013; and
(iii) Cork Institute of Technology Financial Statements 2014
[Officials from Waterford Institute of Technology; Cork Institute of Technology; Higher Education Authority and the Department of Education and Skills]

Members' Interests of Seanad Éireann (Select)
CR4, LH 2000 1 p.m.
AGENDA: Private Meeting

Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Select)
CR4, LH 2000 3 p.m. (T)
AGENDA: Horse Racing Ireland Bill 2015 (resumed)[Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine]

Wednesday 09 December

Transport and Communications (Joint)
CR4, LH 2000 9.30 a.m. (T)
AGENDA: Forthcoming EU Council of Transport Ministers' meeting [Minister for Transport, Transport and Sport]

Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Select)
CR1, LH 2000 10 a.m. (T)
AGENDA: Horse Racing Ireland Bill 2015 [Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine]

Foreign Affairs and Trade (Joint)
CR3, LH 2000 10 a.m. (T)
AGENDA: The current situation in Palestine [The Palestinian Legislative Council]

Human Rights relative to Justice and Equality Matters (Joint sub)
CR2, LH 2000 10 a.m. (T)
AGENDA: UN Convention on the Rights of Older People [Representatives from Age Action]

Members' Interests of Dáil Éireann (Select)
CR2, LH 2000 1 p.m.
AGENDA: Private Meeting

European Scrutiny - Finance and Public Expenditure (Joint sub)
CR4, LH 2000 2 p.m.
AGENDA: Private Meeting

Health and Children (Joint)
CR1, LH 2000 2.30 p.m. (T)
AGENDA: Update on the Medical Card Service [Ms. Anne Marie Hoey, Assistant National Director, Primary Care Reimbursement and Eligibility, Health Service Executive]

Public Service Oversight and Petitions (Joint)
CR3, LH 2000 4 p.m. (T)
AGENDA: Policy in relation to recruitment panels in the Public Appointment Service (PAS) [Ms. Fiona Tierney, CEO, PAS]

Procedure and Privileges of Dáil Éireann Room 2 (off the Main Hall), Leinster House 6 p.m.
AGENDA: Private Meeting