



Statement from the Board of the Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland, 18th February 2011

European Union pursues legal action while state reduces numbers of archaeologists engaged in regulation

The Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland (IAI) notes with concern that the EU Commission has initiated a second legal action against the Government over its failure to adopt a farming environmental directive. In 2008 the European Court of Justice found that Ireland's thresholds were too high for setting out when an environmental impact assessment is required for water management, irrigation and land drainage projects, and the restructuring of rural landholdings.

A study published by the Heritage Council in 1999 found that 34% of archaeological monuments ever known to have existed in seven study areas had been destroyed. The study concluded that in those cases where the cause of destruction could be established, 83% of the monuments had been destroyed during land improvements and drainage works. The same study also found that land improvement works were responsible for varying degrees of damage to monuments in a further 35% of cases (O'Sullivan, O'Connor & Kennedy 1999). Agriculture is seen as a significant engine of future economic growth; the growth of agricultural output and productivity is likely to increase the threats faced by our non-renewable archaeological heritage.

The IAI has learned that it is proposed under the Public Service Employment Control Framework (ECF) to reduce by six the number of archaeologists employed by the National Monuments Service of the Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government. This will reduce the state's capacity to deal with the issues at the heart of the Commission's legal action. We have also learned that under the ECF the National Museum of Ireland is required to lose 17 staff in the current year, and the National Roads Authority is to lose a similar number of staff. These bodies employ highly qualified and experienced archaeologists working at the frontline for the protection of our heritage. We are concerned that the pool of professional archaeological expertise and advice available in the public sector is being diminished at a time when legal action is being pursued against the state.

Furthermore these professionals are needed to help stimulate economic recovery and ensure effective investment of limited public monies. Archaeological heritage is currently being marketed as one of the attributes that makes Ireland a unique tourist destination. The IAI believes that reducing the small numbers of archaeologists employed in the public service will expose Ireland to risk of further legal action from the EU Commission and will also hamper our ability to develop a sustainable heritage tourism industry.

We call on the incoming government to commit itself to implementing the EU directives and to ensuring that the state has the necessary capacity to manage these potential threats to our archaeological heritage and to foster the development of sustainable heritage tourism.

We also call on the incoming government to enact the new National Monuments Bill, which would bring greater clarity to the state's ability to protect its cultural and archaeological heritage.

Source of data:

O'Sullivan, M., O'Connor D. J. & Kennedy, L. 1999 *Archaeological features at risk project*. Heritage Council, Kilkenny.

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