

Dáil Éireann - Volume 636 - 24 April, 2007

Adjournment Debate. - Water Quality.

5. Mr. J. Breen: County Clare and its capital town, Ennis, have been subjected to constant neglect by this Government. On a visit to Ennis in September 2005, the Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Deputy Batt O’Keeffe, sought to assure the people of Ennis of the Government’s absolute commitment to improving the quality of water supply to the town. He stated that €13 million had been ringfenced to improve the quantity and quality of the water supply to Ennis, allowing existing and future water needs of the town and its environs to be met in a sustainable way. This was probably one of the most misleading and insulting statements that any Minister ever made while visiting the county.

The truth is that in April 1999, Ennis Town Council commissioned an independent consultant report on the waste water treatment system in Ennis. This report, which was completed and forwarded to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in 2002, recommended an upgrading project be undertaken at an estimated cost of €50 million. However, the report was shelved in the Minister’s office until September 2006, when with an election approaching it was decided to dust it down and examine it. At that stage, the cost estimate was so out of date that the Minister told Ennis Town Council a new report with up to date costings would have to be produced.

The disdain with which this Government treats County Clare has hit new lows. A boil notice for water use in Ennis has been in place since 2005. The people of Ennis have bought bottled water since 2004, causing substantial increases in house hold bills. In November 2005, I called on the Clare county manager and the Ennis town clerk to issue rent and rates relief to the people of Ennis. Since I was first elected to Clare County Council, I have consistently looked for proper analysis and planning of infrastructure so that proper resourced development would take place.

This week I was informed by Ennis Town Council that because the water and sewerage systems in Ennis are already operating at maximum capacity, future planning applications for developments could be refused. The stark consequences of this action for employment and property prices are the result of the lack of investment in the county by this Government. When Galway was hit by water contamination, the Minister, Deputy Roche, and the Kerry joker, the Minister for Arts, Sports and Tourism, Deputy O'Donoghue, took to the airwaves to promise immediate funding for upgrading works and tourism promotion drives. However, County Clare continues to be neglected.

I recently visited a mother of young children who had a wheelie bin full to the brim with empty water bottles. Our all-promising Government has done nothing to ease her increased weekly costs. The one word that describes what County Clare gets from this Government is "nothing". We will not accept that anymore. The Government paid a big price in County Clare in the last election but it will pay more this time because of its neglect of the county.

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Mr. J. Breen: I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to raise a matter of local and national importance, the ongoing health risks affecting the people of Ennis, County Clare, owing to the contamination of the town's water supply, which has been substandard for some years. It is the subject of constant "boil water" notices, but no action has been taken. Furthermore, the water system is operating at maximum capacity and there has been a failure to upgrade it, including a lack of action on the waste-water consultants' report commissioned by Ennis Town Council and forwarded to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in 2002. The content of that report is out of date, further compromising the quality of the water and sewerage system and increasing the health risk to the public. It is envisaged that planning permission for housing developments will not be [49] granted for the foreseeable

future, with a serious impact on the labour market and causing prices in an already inflated property market to rise yet further. That is what the Taoiseach thinks of the people of Clare.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Morgan.

Mr. J. Breen: He sits giggling and talking while the people of Clare are left—

An Ceann Comhairle: It is not appropriate to expand on the motion submitted to the Office of the Ceann Comhairle.

Mr. J. Breen: Is the Taoiseach operating a double standard for the people of Galway and those of Clare?

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask Deputy Breen to allow Deputy Morgan to speak.

Mr. J. Breen: Is the Taoiseach accountable for the actions of his Ministers? I urge him to stop his giggling and talking. He got a shock in Clare at the last election and he is in for a bigger one the next time.

An Ceann Comhairle: I ask Deputy Breen to allow Deputy Morgan to speak without interruption.

Mr. Morgan: It is hard to beat the shock treatment, James. 5 o'clock I seek the adjournment of the Dáil under Standing Order 31 to discuss the following matter of urgent public concern, namely, the unacceptable delay by the Minister for Health and Children and her Department in resolving outstanding issues with victims of symphysiotomy and the urgent need to honour the promise made in 2003 to carry out an investigation into the barbaric practice which was performed in some hospitals until 1982, long after it had ceased even in developing nations, and for these courageous survivors to be treated like those involved in the Michael Neary case.

