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*Josepha Madigan, TD
Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
30 January, 2019*

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Re: Cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme

Dear Minister;

We note your detailed response in a written Parliamentary Question on 4 December 2019 on the issue of relocation of turf cutters under the 2011 'Cessation of turf cutting compensation scheme'. We acknowledge your comment that 'Relocation of turf cutters is a complex process'.

'Notwithstanding this', you state:

'Progress in relocation has been achieved in a number of cases and 72 turf cutters from 11 raised bog designated sites have been relocated to non-designated bogs. A further 4 relocation sites in counties Galway, Roscommon and Westmeath, which will accommodate up to 54 turf cutters, have been developed by my Department and are scheduled to be operational from 2020. Relocation sites for a further 6 special areas of conservation have been identified by the Department and are at various stages of development. These could accommodate up to approximately 50 turf cutters. The Department is still investigating suitable relocation sites for a further 7 raised bog special areas of conservation.'

Relocation undermines the purpose of the scheme, rightly entitled 'Cessation' of turf cutting compensation scheme. 'Relocation' is not 'cessation'.

In a test case taken by environmental interests opposing your facilitation of turf cutters previously cutting on the Special Area of Conservation bog at SAC Ballynafagh Bog to the adjacent Coolree Bog near Robertstown, Co. Kildare [303503: Coolree Bog, townlands of Coolree & Blackwood, Robertstown, Co. Kildare], An Bord Pleanála overruled the Inspector's view that 'the scale of the works proposed is small and the impacts are not considered to be significant', ruling in September 2019 that:

'Over the lifetime of the project, it would contribute both directly and indirectly to greenhouse gas emissions. Whilst cognisant that there were conflicting national policies applicable to the proposal, the Board considered that the proposed development was in contravention of the national climate action policy objective to achieve transition to a low-carbon energy system.'

In these circumstances, your continued proposals to allow the relocation of turf cutters is difficult to understand and we would be grateful if you would examine the Department's position consequent on this decision and revert to us without delay.

Yours, etc,

Tony Lowes