THE IRISH TIMES

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HOW TO SPEND YOUR WAY TO A HOLIDAY



Joanne Hunt
Your Money

> In a radically changed world, Andy Burnham's policy of edging the UK back towards the EU, slowly and gradually via a referendum, makes sense



Kathy Sheridan
Opinion



IRELAND HAD ENOUGH TO BEAT SOUTH AFRICA. AUSTRALIA WILL BE TOUGHER

Gordon D'Arcy
Sport

Opposition steps up pressure on Minister to explain HSE sacking

Carroll MacNeill made aware of plan to dismiss O'Connor 'last Thursday'

Coalition leaders seek to distance themselves from HSE chief's removal



■ **Jennifer Carroll MacNeill at a meeting of the Oireachtas Budgetary Oversight Committee yesterday.**
PHOTOGRAPH: OIREACHTAS TV

JACK HORGAN-JONES, PAT LEAHY, MARTIN WALL SHAUNA BOWERS and **MARIE O'HALLORAN**

Pressure was mounting on the Government last night to provide greater clarity on the sacking of HSE chief executive Anne O'Connor as Coalition leaders sought to distance themselves from her removal.

As controversy continued over O'Connor's sacking, events leading up to her dramatic removal – and the political knowledge of that process – took centre stage yesterday.

Minister for Health Jennifer Carroll MacNeill told the Oireachtas Budgetary Oversight Committee she raised concerns about the performance of the HSE – including the rate at which it was hiring staff – months before O'Connor's sacking.

She said she was informed in September that the performance process for O'Connor was being escalated, and that this was when Coalition leaders were informed.

Spokesmen for Taoiseach Micheál Martin and Tánaiste Simon Harris said last night they did not know the process could lead to her removal when they were informed of it in September.

The pressure on the Minister is unlikely to ebb. The Oireachtas Health Committee has invited the HSE board to appear before it next week, while Carroll MacNeill is also due before the committee today. There is also a suggestion she may be called in for another session tomorrow. The Taoiseach further suggested she would speak in the Dáil about the controversy.

The Taoiseach had not flagged any concerns about O'Connor's performance in recent months, his spokesman said.

Carroll MacNeill told the budgetary committee she was made aware of the intention to remove O'Connor "last Thursday". However, Martin and Harris were not told until Saturday, after Carroll MacNeill had consulted Attorney General Rossa Fanning.

The Minister insisted she did not raise O'Connor's performance specifically with HSE chairman Ciaran Devane, but noted "the CEO is the head of the HSE and the performance is linked to that".

The HSE board said O'Connor's performance was monitored, including through reviews in June and October.

The Taoiseach said the decision of the HSE board to remove O'Connor was "unanimous" and "not the result of any single event or issue".

The board's determination was based on "its assessment of performance and leadership over a period of nearly eight months".

He insisted in the Dáil, to Opposition heckling, "I didn't sack anybody" and "the Government hasn't sacked anybody". Carroll MacNeill sat next to the Taoiseach during a testy Leaders' Questions entirely focused on O'Connor's dismissal.

Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald accused Carroll MacNeill of "dodging responsibility".

McDonald said the Minister hid behind the claim O'Connor's firing was exclusively a matter for the board.

"Nobody believes the head of the HSE would be fired without the involvement of the Minister for Health or the Government," she said.

Social Democrats acting leader Cian O'Callaghan described the HSE as being in "utter chaos" and claimed the Minister for Health was "ducking for cover".

Labour leader Ivana Bacik said Carroll MacNeill had been "micromanaging" and "power grabbing" by attending board meetings. But she was "remarkably disengaged" about O'Connor's sacking.

Bacik said it was "utterly perverse" to sack the chief executive if the Government was saying outcomes were so much better in health. And if budget overruns were really the reason then every chief executive would have been ousted, she said.

In a statement, the HSE board said it agreed a set of performance objectives with O'Connor following her appointment in March, including financial management, urgent and emergency care performance and waiting list management.

Meanwhile, supporters of O'Connor have criticised the behaviour of members of the HSE board.

Sources said O'Connor had raised concerns with Devane on at least one occasion about what senior management team members perceived as verbally aggressive language and lack of courtesy by board members towards them.

→ **Government stands over sacking while claiming that it had nothing to do with it: page 2**

Chay Bowes could lose his firearms dealer licence

CONOR GALLAGHER
Investigations Reporter

The Department of Justice is exploring how it might revoke a firearms dealer licence owned by Chay Bowes, who was last week placed under EU sanctions for allegedly spreading pro-Russian propaganda.

Bowes previously ran a gun shop in Tallaght, Dublin, before the business closed in 2018. However, he retains the licence allowing him to trade in restricted firearms.

The Department of Justice, which issued the licence, does not suspect Bowes of using the licence illegally or improperly.

However, officials are concerned the licence could be considered a form of economic aid and could therefore be prohibited under the EU sanctions.

Department officials are examining the legislation and are liaising with gardaí to determine if they are required to revoke the licence and if they can do so under the law.

The sanctions, which were announced last week, will freeze any financial assets Bowes holds inside the EU and ban him from travelling to other member states.

EU citizens and businesses are also prohibited from paying or transferring funds to individuals who have been placed on the sanctions list.

However, Bowes will be able to access money in the EU for his basic needs, including housing, and to pay legal fees.

The travel ban does not necessarily mean Bowes will be barred from travelling to the Republic. He is from Dublin but understood to be based in Moscow much of the time.

In response to queries, Bowes's solicitor Ruadhán Mac Aodháin said his client "has been licensed for many years, including in restricted firearms, by the Department of Justice. He has not been involved for a number of years in this area." He added the sanctions have had a "devastating effect on his wife and four children". The solicitor said Bowes was contacted by the department through the Garda.

In the legal text setting out the sanctions decision, the EU said Bowes worked for Russian broadcaster RT, formerly known as Russia Today. The channel is banned in the EU and widely regarded as a propaganda arm of the Russian state. The EU decision accused Bowes of "facilitating" and supporting the actions and policies of the Russian government that were a threat to European democracy.



■ **Chay Bowes: sanctioned for allegedly spreading pro-Russian propaganda**

He is one of only a handful of EU citizens, and the only Irish person, to be specifically sanctioned by the EU since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.Bowes has repeatedly denied the accusations laid out in the sanctions and said he has hired a lawyer to fight his case in court. Minister for Foreign Affairs Helen McEntee has received papers from Dublin-based firm Prospect law, on behalf of Bowes, informing her of the court challenge, he said.

Most dangerous place for a woman 'is her own home'

MARY CAROLAN
Legal Affairs Correspondent

The number of women dying in violent circumstances in the State increased by 29 per cent over the last five years, according to a new report.

Women's Aid said a total of 291 women, including 13 so far this year, have died violently in the 30 years since the charity began its Femicide Watch Report, the latest edition of which is published today.

Of 235 resolved cases, 89 per cent were killed by a man they knew, 57 per cent were killed by a current or former partner, and 68 per cent were killed in their own homes.

Women's Aid chief executive Sarah Benson said the findings are in line with UN and EU figures, which show "the most dangerous place for a woman is her own home, and the most likely killer is a man she knows".

"Intimate partner femicide rarely comes out of nowhere," she said. "Separation, coercive control, non-fatal strangulation, threats to kill and stalking are all known warning signs. When a woman tells Women's Aid that she is afraid for her life, we believe her."

The report showed violent deaths of women fell from 67 between 1996 and 2000 to 31 between 2016 and 2020.

"Worryingly, that progress has now reversed," Benson said, noting that the 40 violent deaths from 2021-2025 represented a 29 per cent increase. The figure of 13 women who have died in violent circumstances so far this year is up from seven last year.

Stabbing with a knife or other sharp objects (34 per cent) was the most common method used, the report notes, with a majority of killers, and most of those killed, Irish people.

Of 25 murder-suicides, 24 involved a killer who was the woman's partner or ex-partner. In the other murder-suicide, it was the woman's son.

Since 1996, 25 children have been killed alongside a woman, usually their mother, and 410 people lost their mother to femicide, most of them under 18.

In 32 cases (11 per cent), no one has been held accountable. It said nine women remain missing, believed murdered.



Weather

Lingering rain in the east. Dry elsewhere with sunny spells. Cool with highs of 6-9 degrees.

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