

## New Justice Minister to consider ‘the Forgotten’



Justice Minister Frances Fitzgerald

Justice Minister Frances Fitzgerald has made contact with the Waterford-based Committee For The Forgotten, reviving hopes for the prompt establishment of a DNA database which could lead the identification of body parts retrieved from the Irish coast.

The Munster Express understands that much of the Committee’s initial interaction with the Department of Justice ‘slipped through the administrative cracks’ during the internal upheaval which surrounded the resignation of former minister Alan Shatter.

“I decided to send a registered letter to the Department of Justice, as opposed to another email, in the hope that a physical piece of paper on a desk in Dublin might provoke a reaction, and it did,” said Committee member and newly elected Councillor Jim Griffin.

“I thought it was important to convey to coastal communities in the south east and all around the country that we’d not forgotten about what led to the creation of the committee in the first place: the establishment of the DNA database,” said Cllr Griffin (Sinn Féin).

“Obviously there’s been a great deal going on within the Department of Justice for the better part of a year; it’s fair to say that the eye was taken off the ball on quite a few fronts, so to receive a reply is at least an acknowledgment on the Department’s behalf that there’s still an awareness at government level over what we’re looking for.

“Now we need to remind Minister Fitzgerald and her colleagues over what we’d like to see enshrined in legislation, because if a body part can be identified and if a national framework is put in place, then we can bring some sense of closure to those bereaved by the loss of loved ones still deemed officially missing, be they lost at land or, in most instances, at sea.”

This newspaper, which has led the way in campaigning for the establishment of such a DNA database, will be sending all reports published to date regarding the Committee For The Forgotten’s campaign, directly to Minister Fitzgerald’s office.

What makes the case for such a database to be established slightly easier (particularly when it comes to the forgotten) is that a legislative framework has, essentially already in place since June of this year.

The Criminal Justice (Forensic Evidence and DNA Database System) Bill 2013 was passed by the Seanad on June 11th, having won a green light from the Dáil on May 1st.

“The key innovation in the Bill is the establishment of a DNA database to assist the Garda Síochána in tackling crime,” read a Department of Justice statement. “The enactment of this legislation fulfils a key Programme for Government commitment.

“The database, when established, will have the capacity to link crimes and to identify suspects in relation to unsolved crimes, while enabling the Gardaí to better target their investigations and make better use of resources.

“Such database technology in the forensics field has the added benefit of facilitating the searching, subject to strict conditions, of other national DNA databases.”

The creation of the DNA Database System has a two-fold purpose - 1: to match a DNA profile from an individual to an

unidentified crime scene profile obtained during a criminal investigation (and when there is no match to eliminate all individuals on the database as potential suspects and, 2: “to assist with identifying missing and unknown persons (severely ill/injured persons who cannot identify themselves or unidentified human remains)”.

Said Jim Griffin: “Given that this bill was passed towards the end of the Dáil term before the summer recess, it did so under the radar a little bit, in my view.

“What we as a Committee wish to see happen is that both strands identified in the creation of the DNA Database are equally administered, funded and enacted. And we as a Committee have to do what we can to ensure that that ultimately proves the case.”

The Committee For The Forgotten is expected to meet in Waterford within the next week. week or so. “We’ve not forgotten what we formed our committee for in the first place,” Cllr Griffin added. “Now we need to see this through to its just and proper conclusion.”