



COMMISSIONERS OF IRISH LIGHTS

The Minister of State for Transport (John Hayes): The three general lighthouse authorities (GLAs) for the United Kingdom and Ireland provide an essential service for mariners through the deployment of coastal aids to navigation and the inspection of harbour lights. Their work is financed through light dues levied on ships using UK and Irish ports and paid into the General Lighthouse Fund (GLF). Since 2010 the UK Government has been committed to reducing this cost to the shipping industry in partnership with the GLAs.

Increasing collaborative working among the GLAs continues to bear fruit. They have recently awarded a £13m seven-year contract for the provision of helicopter services to cover all three GLAs. The new contract will commence in December 2015 and will deliver significant savings of around £7.9m to the GLF.

Tri-GLA operations are supported by the UK and Irish governments, but the shipping industry has expressed concern in recent years that the costs of the Commissioners of Irish Lights' (CIL) operations in the Republic of Ireland should be met fully from Irish sources. In 2010, the two governments committed to a process of enabling CIL to increase its revenue from Irish sources with the expectation of achieving full self-financing of its activities in the Republic by 2015-16.

The agreement was subject to CIL's pension liabilities being addressed. This criterion was met on 1 April 2014 when the pension schemes of all three GLAs were transferred to the UK's Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (*6 March 2014, columns 64WS-65WS*). Furthermore, since the 2010 agreement, CIL has reduced its costs by an impressive 31%, while simultaneously increasing commercial income. Fully concluding the 2010 agreement now relies on increasing light dues income in Ireland.

To do this, the UK and Irish governments have agreed to ensure that ships pay light dues at the rate applicable at the first port where they become liable. Ships liable to pay the higher light dues rate in Ireland will have to do so and the option for ships which call in the UK and Ireland to buy multiple light dues certificates in advance will be withdrawn. As now, once ships have made a light dues payment, they will be exempt from further payments when calling at ports in both the UK and Ireland for the following month.

In addition, the Irish Government confirmed its continuing support for CIL by increasing its financial contribution. These arrangements are subject to a trial period of three years from April 2015 so that their cost-effectiveness and sustainability can be monitored. Any changes required after that period will maintain the principles of the 2010 agreement.