

Written Ministerial Statement

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Environment

DRUMCLAY CRANNÓG EXCAVATION: ACTION PLAN

Published at 1.00 pm on Thursday 25 June 2015

Mr Durkan (The Minister of the Environment): I am announcing today the publication of an Action Plan in response to the Review of the context of the excavation at a Crannóg in Drumclay Townland, County Fermanagh, on the route of the Cherrymount Link Road.

The primary purpose of the Review was to look at the reasons why this excavation became necessary at Drumclay Crannóg, and the role of the Department and, in particular, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, in the decision-making process concerning the treatment of archaeological remains at this site prior to July 2012. The key finding of the review notes that the circumstances which resulted in the excavation of Drumclay Crannóg were a result of both systemic weaknesses as well as human judgement. The review team made a number of recommendations to improve the operation of the regulatory regime.

I welcome Professor Cooney's Review and his findings. There is no doubt that there were weakness in the system here and human error. Alex Attwood MLA, in his role as Minister of the Environment, took an unprecedented approach to dealing with this site, and I commend him for it. The outcome was the delivery of one of the most important archaeological excavations ever undertaken in Northern Ireland, one of the most important excavations on the island of Ireland, and indeed one of the most important undertaken in northwest Europe. This was an internationally-important excavation, one of major significance now and for future generations.

My department fixed a problem; it is important that lessons are learned from what happened so that we can continue to improve how these kinds of works are conducted in the future. It is possible that, had more robust enforcement action been taken at an earlier stage, some of the problems that emerged could have been avoided. However, my predecessor, supported by his officials, took swift action to deliver this excavation.

The Review was commissioned to see how the processes involved in the management of the excavation of an historic site should be done better, and specific lessons that need to be learned and practices to be adopted.

I have considered the findings of Professor Cooney's report, and for my part I am now publishing an Action Plan to implement the report's recommendations, with significant progress already being made.

It is particularly important now, with the major changed arrangement of government departments planned for May 2016, that the lessons from Drumclay Crannóg are not forgotten. This is why I am making this Written Statement to the Assembly on this matter: the excavations at Drumclay Crannóg were and are of considerable public interest, and my department's Action Plan is similarly important.

Throughout the excavation there was tremendous interest, from the public at large as well as politicians and professional archaeologists, in the excavation. Local elected representatives, as well as the Environment and the Culture Arts and Leisure Committees from this Assembly, visited the site. Alex Attwood MLA opened the site to the public, allowing as many people as possible to see the excavations as they happened.

I am heartened by that interest, something that has been reinforced throughout my time as Minister of the Environment. The huge interest that was shown throughout the excavation of Drumclay Crannóg reinforced for me how much people value their heritage, and how important it is for wider society to know about, and take part in, discovering our rich and unique archaeological heritage. By delivering on the Action Plan developed in response to Professor Cooney's report, we will help ensure that the public interest in our archaeological heritage is better-served now and in the future.

Full details of the Action Plan, including a complete copy of Professor Cooney's report is attached and has also been published on the Department's website at

<http://www.doeni.gov.uk/built-report-drumclay-crannog-review-of-context-of-excavation-2015.pdf>.