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## State agencies and state enterprises, 2015

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### **New agencies created**

As the pace of the rationalisation programme announced in 2011 came to a stall, a number of new agencies came into being in 2015.

They included the following:

- The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), an independent, statutory body, was established on 1 October under the Workplace Relations Act, 2015. The role of the WRC is to assume the roles and functions previously carried out by the National Employment Rights Authority, the Equality Tribunal, the Labour Relations Commission, the Rights Commissioners Service and the first-instance (complaints and referrals) functions of the Employment Appeals Tribunal.
- Sport Ireland, which takes responsibility for sport, was established from a merger between the National Sports Campus Development Authority and the Irish Sports Council, arising from the Sport Ireland Act, 2015.
- Transport Infrastructure Ireland was established in August through a merger of the National Roads Authority and the Railway Procurement Agency, as provided for under the Roads Act, 2015.

Also, the Opticians Board was merged into the large regulator CORU. In February a new Optical Registration Board at CORU was appointed by the Minister for Health. This meant that all persons previously registered with The Opticians Board saw their registration transfer to the new board.

The Minister for Justice and Equality formally assumed responsibility for the Valuation Office and Ordnance Survey Ireland as of 1 January 2016. The purpose of this change was to ensure cohesion prior to their merger with the Property Registration Authority to form a new property and land administration agency, Táilte Éireann, due to take place in 2016.

### **Challenges continue for Irish Water**

Irish Water continued to receive much negative publicity in 2015. In July Eurostat ruled that the utility could not be kept off the government's balance sheet. The Central Statistics Office responded to the ruling by noting that it came under a new procedure for statistical classifications, adding that the classification for Irish Water would be reviewed again next year.

Level of non-payment of water charges remained high, with figures published by Irish Water in October noting that 55 per cent of its customer base had paid their bills, although these figures were challenged by opposition parties.

In September Fianna Fáil said that it supported the abolition of Irish Water, with responsibility for delivery of water services being returned to local authorities. Sinn Féin also supported abolition, while new party Renua said it would like to 'dismantle' the entity but keep water charges in place. The Social Democrats proposed to abolish water charges but keep the entity as a means to update infrastructure.

### **Energy companies**

In October Bord na Móna announced that it would no longer harvest energy peat and would instead complete its move to a sustainable business within fifteen years. It planned to focus on renewable energy development, including wind and solar projects, domestic fuel, biomass development, resource recovery, horticulture and ecotourism.

In December the High Court awarded costs in favour of University College Cork (UCC) following its legal action against the ESB concerning flooding of parts of its campus in 2009. The case had lasted

over 100 days and concerned the way in which the ESB had handled the release of water from its dams on the River Lee, with UCC arguing that it had led to millions of euro worth of damage at the university.