April 5th, 2016

**Harkin Slams Department on Aran Islands Air Tender – Denial of Democratic Rights**

The decision of Minister Joe McHugh to cancel a meeting with Aran Island representatives to discuss the air service to the islands has been described as a worrying interference by officials whose objectives appeared to conflict with the needs of those to be serviced.

This was stated by Independent MEP Marian Harkin when she called for a legal justification for the reason given for the cancellation of the meeting. She said:- “As far as I am aware the meeting was cancelled as a result of insistence by officials that the Minister could not enter discussion with islanders as the tender has been published. I cannot see why the Minister cannot talk with the people to be serviced through this tender since they are not themselves involved in tendering. As Irish citizens they are entitled to meet their Minister in an open and transparent process to make their views known and any effort to hinder this democratic process must be questioned.

“What is particularly worrying about this tender is the raising of the fare for islanders from €35 to €40 and for visitors from €40 to €60. How does this fit with the need to facilitate those living on the islands and the need to maximise the number of tourists who visit the islands. I am very surprised at the designation of a fixed price for tickets which represents an increased price for all users. Where is the competition aspect in this tender? Currently it is possible to book flights between several European destinations for between €4.99 and €19.99.

I am also concerned at the 10kg baggage limit per person which does not in any way relate to islanders needs or to those required to travel to provide services on the island.

“I have strong reservations about how this tender has been constructed and I would call on the Minister to halt the process until questionable content in it can be clearly examined. The Department needs to recognise that the Public Service Obligation is designed for the interest of the people of the Aran islands and this was made clear to me at a recent meeting with senior officials in Brussels,”, Independent MEP Marian Harkin concluded.

Further information from: Marian Harkin MEP

 Tel: +086-8341758

E-mail: [marian.harkin@ep.europa.eu](mailto:marian.harkin@ep.europa.eu)

Website: [www.marianharkin.ie](http://www.marianharkin.ie/)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/marianharkin](http://www.facebook.com/marianharkin)

Twitter: [www.twitter.com/MarianHarkin](http://www.twitter.com/MarianHarkin)

"MEP of the Year " Award Winner 2011 & 2012