



**Seirbhís Thithe
an Oireachtais**
**Houses of the
Oireachtas Service**

Oifig Chléireach na Dála
agus an Ard-Rúnaí

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Verona Murphy, T.D.,
Ceann Comhairle of Dáil Éireann.

Dear Ceann Comhairle,

As requested by you, I am setting out the position regarding the procedures and advice followed at yesterday's sitting of Dáil Éireann (Tuesday, 25 March 2025). I intend to place this letter in the Oireachtas Library for the information of members of Dáil Éireann.

1. Standing Orders which were applied

1.1 Order of Business

Proceedings were conducted in accordance with Standing Orders as follows:

Standing Order 35(2) provides that "the Ceann Comhairle may permit, at his or her discretion, a statement not exceeding one minute from a representative of each party or group in Opposition, following which a member of the Government may make a statement in response which shall not exceed three minutes".

Due to the significant level of disorder in the Chamber, you exercised your discretion, as was your entitlement under Standing Order 35(1), to proceed directly to put the question on the Order of Business.

Standing Order 85(1) provides that when any question is to be put to the Dáil, the Ceann Comhairle shall rise and put the question, and shall judge from the answers to the question and declare the result in his or her opinion of the putting of the question.

Standing Order 85(2) provides that after the Ceann Comhairle shall have declared the result, in his or her opinion, of the putting of the question, any member who dissents may demand a division upon that question.

As per the Standing Order, you declared your opinion that the arrangements on the Order of Business were agreed. It is a longstanding parliamentary requirement that members dissenting from the Chair's declaration must say the word "Vótáil" to trigger a division. The Official Report of the Debates and the Clerk's sheet (which is the basis for the Journal of Proceedings, the legal record of the Dáil) both confirm that the word "Vótáil" was not audible in the Chamber when you put the question on the Order of Business. The declaration of the result by you was therefore fully in accordance with Standing Orders.

1.2 Questions on Policy or Legislation

Standing Order 36 provides for Questions on Policy or Legislation and states that the Ceann Comhairle may permit, at his or her discretion, questions to the Taoiseach.

The significant level of disorder in the Chamber continued even after the resumption of the sitting following a 30-minute suspension under Standing Order 79. In the circumstances, you exercised your discretion, as was your entitlement under Standing Order 36, to proceed directly to proceedings on the motion re Amendment of Standing Orders.

1.3 Motion re Amendment of Standing Orders

Standing Order 63 provides that if a member does not move a motion or amendment which stands in their name, such motion or amendment shall lapse unless moved by another member.

You called on the Government Chief Whip to move the motion, which she duly moved. You then twice called on Deputy Mary Lou McDonald to move the amendment in her name and asked if the amendment was agreed. You then declared that the amendment was not agreed. No member dissented from this declaration.

As the Order of Business as agreed provided that the motion be taken without debate, you were obliged to immediately proceed to put the question on the motion itself. The motion was put to the House, members said “Vótáil”, the Clerk rang the bells, and the division was taken in accordance with Standing Orders.

1.4 Division on the motion re Amendment of Standing Orders

Standing Order 87 provides that two duly nominated tellers be appointed for each side. The following tellers were appointed and announced to the House:

- Tá: Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie.
- Níl: Deputies Pádraig MacLochlainn and Duncan Smith.

The division was taken by electronic means in accordance with Standing Order 88. The result as displayed on the screens in the Chamber was Tá, 94; Níl, 74.

Standing Order 90 provides that, on the completion of the count, the tellers shall sign a division paper (which is commonly called “the tellers’ sheet”) which shall be handed to the Ceann Comhairle who shall announce the numbers and declare the decision.

On the conclusion of voting yesterday, the Níl tellers refused to sign the tellers’ sheet.

Standing Order 91 provides as follows: If the Ceann Comhairle is satisfied that the taking of the division has been obstructed and the tellers of one side refuse to comply with Standing Order 90 without good reason, he or she may declare the determination of the Dáil in favour of the other side.

The decision under this Standing Order, which is aimed at preventing the obstruction of divisions due to gross disorder and refusal by duly nominated tellers to fulfil their obligations under Standing Orders, is entirely at the Ceann Comhairle’s discretion. Therefore, your decision yesterday to declare the motion agreed was fully compliant with Standing Orders and the powers conferred upon you as Ceann Comhairle.

1.5 Adjournment of the Dáil due to great disorder

After declaring the result on the motion, you then moved to Taoiseach's Questions. The Taoiseach could not be heard due to the continuing disorder in the Chamber, and it was further evident that there was little prospect of order being restored despite the motion having been agreed by a majority of members present and voting in line with Standing Order 92(1).

Standing Order 79 provides that "in the case of great disorder, the Ceann Comhairle may adjourn the Dáil without question put".

While this power is not used lightly, Ruling 299 provides that "where the business of the House is being obstructed and the Chair's rulings not accepted, there is justification for the adjournment of the House as a matter of great disorder".

2. General observations

In conclusion, I would make some general observations about the role of the Chair and yesterday's proceedings.

Under Standing Order 75(2), the Ceann Comhairle is the sole judge of order in Dáil proceedings and has authority to suppress disorder and to enforce prompt obedience to his or her ruling.

While the Ceann Comhairle has, in their capacity as Chair of the Business Committee, on occasion sought to assist members to reach a consensus, once a matter reaches the floor of the Dáil and is duly ordered, the Ceann Comhairle must proceed with the business as ordered. The Ceann Comhairle cannot allow a situation where disorderly conduct is allowed to frustrate the business of the Dáil. Otherwise, the Dáil would be unable to discharge its constitutional functions.

The motion in question was tabled in line with the notice requirements under Standing Order 41, and once these requirements were satisfied and the business was ordered by the House, the Ceann Comhairle had no discretion to unilaterally set aside the Order of Business. This is fundamental to the role of the Chair. Specifically, Ruling 217 states that the Chair must proceed with the business of the House as ordered.

Yesterday's proceedings were extraordinarily difficult for the Chair and indeed for all the staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service who support the work of the Dáil Chamber. The operation of the Dáil is only possible if members accept the Chair's authority and rulings. Ultimately the Constitution provides that all decisions are made by a majority of the members present and voting. Notwithstanding the unprecedented level of dissent yesterday, once a matter is put to the House, the only remedy for those dissenting is through the voting process in the House.



Peter Finnegan,

Clerk of Dáil Éireann

Secretary General of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service