

## **Tuairisc Bhliantúil an Rúnaí**

I am pleased to present my first Munster Council Annual Report, which will focus on the main activities of the Council from the Convention of 2018 to the Convention of 2019. I was appointed Rúnaí of the Munster Council in February 2018 and began the role in May of 2018. It has been a challenging year, but overall, a very successful year for the Council and for the Association in the province of Munster.

### **Overview of the 2018 Season**

2018 was a year of great change in the GAA, with new formats introduced in the Senior Hurling and Senior Football Inter County Championships, along with a raft of changes designed to improve fixture scheduling.

The change to the Intercounty Hurling Championship took place primarily at Provincial level, with the introduction of a Round Robin format, which resulted in the number of games in the Munster Senior Hurling Championship increasing from 4 to 11. There is no doubt, we witnessed a superb Munster Senior Hurling Championship, attended by 250,000 people and watched on live TV by over 2.3 million viewers.

The increase in the number of games presented a unique challenge to the Council, in that never before had we organised two major Senior Hurling Championship games on the one day and 11 in the space of 7 weeks. This presented logistical challenges in terms of ticket selling, ticket scanning, stewarding and general event planning. I am happy to report that the organisation of the Senior Hurling Championship was a great success, thanks to our staff and stewards, and all games ran very smoothly from an organisational point of view.

On the field of play, there were many dramatic moments, such as the Cork v Limerick draw in Pairc Ui Chaoimh, the Cork v Tipperary draw in Thurles, the late Clare comeback against Tipperary and the dramatic draw between Waterford and Tipperary in the Gaelic Grounds. The Munster Final between Cork and Clare was a thrilling encounter, played out in front of 45,500 spectators at a sun baked Semple Stadium in Thurles. The frantic action continued on in to the All-Ireland series, with 3 extraordinary Semi-Finals capturing the imagination of the public on a level that hasn't been seen in many years. To crown it all, Limerick ended a 45 year wait for a Senior Title in a dramatic final. The scenes that followed the final whistle and in the days and weeks afterwards in Limerick, will live long in the memory.

The extra games and the increased profile have been positive for the game of hurling. With sport now increasingly globalised and live coverage of various sports from across the world readily available to every household, we need the game of hurling in the spotlight. Undoubtedly, the 3 draws in the Round Robin phase were key to keeping the Munster Championship tight until the end and this won't always be the case. Supporters are already looking forward to 2019, and that is directly due to the exciting action in Munster, Leinster and in the All-Ireland Series in 2018. So popular was hurling in 2018 that RTE relived the action at Christmas through the excellently produced 'Summer of Hurling' series. The game has witnessed a huge spike in public interest, and that is to be welcomed.

The Round Robin system is with us for another two years before it is reviewed. While the new system has undoubtedly had an impact on the ability of County Boards to run Club Championship games in May and June, we owe it to ourselves and to the game to review the new system in as broad a context as possible. Fixtures will be dealt with later.

Unfortunately, our Senior Football Championship failed to light a spark, with the Final in particular being one of the most disappointing contests in recent years. Ciarraí inflicted a 20 point defeat on Corcaigh in a game that petered out long before the final whistle. While one sided contests can always arise and happen in all Competitions, Ciarraí have now won six Munster Senior Football Titles in a row. Ciarraí were also dominant at Minor and Under 20 Football level, winning both titles, although Corcaigh will have considered themselves unlucky not to have won at least one of those Competitions. Ciarraí have now won six Munster Minor Football Championships in a row and in those six years, Kerry clubs have captured 14 of the 18 Provincial Club Titles on offer.

These figures underline the dominance of Ciarraí of Football in the Province at this point in time. It is no fault of Ciarraí that they are dominating this code and they must be complemented on the great developmental work that has been undertaken in the County. There is no doubt that we need one of the other Counties in the Province, and Cork in particular, to rise to the challenge and get back to winning ways once again. Tiobraid Árann and An Clár have made great progress in recent years and it would be great to see one of those Counties go on to make a breakthrough at Senior Championship level in Munster. I welcome the recent publication of the Cork County Board football development strategy and hopefully its implementation will reap rewards in the years to come.

In all, the Council ran 83 games in 2018, across the various Club and County competitions, which were held over 71 match days. These games had a combined attendance of 368,000. We are very grateful for the huge support our games receive from the people of Munster and this support is critical to us and allows us to invest in the development of Gaelic Games in the Province. At club level, the Council approved the playing of just over 2,000 challenge and tournament games.

### **Performance of Munster Teams in National Competitions**

Overall, it was a year of great success for Munster teams on the Intercounty and Club scene, with 3 of the 6 main Inter-County titles going to Munster Counties (Luimneach in Senior Hurling, Tiobraid Árann in Under 21 Hurling and Ciarraí in Minor Football). It was a similar story on the Club scene, with 3 of the 6 AIB All-Ireland Club Championship titles going to Munster Clubs (Ceann Turc in Intermediate Hurling, Ardmhór in Junior Hurling and Cnoc na Graí in Junior Football).

As already referenced, Luimneach bridged a 45 year gap to win the All-Ireland Senior Hurling Title, with both Corcaigh and An Clár counting themselves unlucky not to have made the Final. Tiobraid Árann were outstanding in winning the All-Ireland Under 21 Hurling Title, beating Corcaigh in an all Munster All-Ireland Final. The Province has dominated this competition of late, with 9 of the last 10 All-Ireland Under 21 Titles being won by Munster Counties.

The achievement of Ciarraí in winning their 5<sup>th</sup> All-Ireland Minor Championship in a row deserves particular mention. It is an extraordinary achievement, particularly given that the team that won the 5<sup>th</sup>, bears little or no resemblance to the team that won the 1<sup>st</sup>. It is testament to the great work going on in the County and mirrors the great work that has taken place, particularly at Post Primary Schools level.

Na Piarraigh of Luimneach (Senior Hurling), and Nemo Rangers of Corcaigh (Senior Football) contested the All-Ireland Senior Club finals, with Na Piarraigh unlucky to lose out to Cuala after a replay.

Unfortunately, our Senior Football teams failed to make any great impression on the Senior Football Championship, with no side reaching the All-Ireland semi-finals and just Ciarraí reaching the Super 8.

Overall, the Super 8 format in the Senior Football Championship struggled to generate public interest like the Senior Hurling Championship did. There were some very good games in it, but it struggled to capture the imagination of the public, probably due to a sense of inevitability as to who the overall Championship winners would be. As with the hurling format, this is being trialled for a 3 year period, and we need to give it the full three years in order to conduct as fair and thorough a review as possible. A slight tweak being proposed for 2019, whereby the Provincial Champions have home advantage in the first round of the Round Robin, may help to generate increased local interest.

I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate Áth Cliath on winning four 4 All-Ireland Senior Football Titles in a row. As we know, this is a rare achievement in the GAA, and they possess a group of supremely talented players at this point in time.

At Higher Education level, University of Limerick won the Fitzgibbon Cup, making it the fourth year in a row that the Title has been won by a Limerick College and the eighth year in a row that a Munster Third Level College has claimed the title. At Post Primary level, our schools were unsuccessful in the Senior A grades, with Ard Scoil Rís (Luimneach) losing the Senior Final to St. Kieran’s of Kilkenny. However, Scarriff Community College (An Clár) won the Masita GAA All Ireland Post Primary Schools Michael Cusack Cup (Senior C Hurling).

Corcaigh were once again crowned All Ireland Senior Camogie Champions, following a one point victory over Kilkenny in a very exciting final, giving the team their 4<sup>th</sup> title in 5 years. Corcaigh also reached the Senior Ladies Gaelic Football Association final, losing to Ath Cliath, in front of a record breaking attendance of 50,141. Luimneach were successful in capturing the Junior Ladies Gaelic Football Association All Ireland title, beating An Lú in the final. I and delighted to see the growth that is taking place in both sports and I hope that participation levels in Ladies Gaelic Football and Camogie continue to increase.

I want to complement and congratulate all Counties and all Club teams who were successful in the various competitions organised by the Munster Council in 2018. The winners of these competitions are outlined in table 1 and table 2. I would also like to take the opportunity to wish all Munster teams competing in the forthcoming All Ireland AIB Club Championships the best of luck.

Table 1: Winners of Intercounty Competitions

Intercounty Competition	Winner
Senior Hurling	Corcaigh
Under 21 Hurling	Corcaigh
Minor Hurling	Tiobraid Árann
Senior Football	Ciarraí
Under 21 Football	Ciarraí
Minor Football	Ciarraí
Junior Football	Ciarraí
Co-Op Superstores Munster Hurling League	Luimneach
McGrath Cup	Corcaigh

Table 2: Winners of Club Competitions

Club Competition	Winner
Senior Hurling	Baile Mic Ghonair, Portlairge
Intermediate Hurling	Rathluirc, Corcaigh
Junior Hurling	Clough Dubh, Corcaigh
Senior Football	Dr. Crócaigh, Ciarraí
Intermediate Football	Cill Cummin, Ciarraí
Junior Football	Lios an Phúca, Ciarraí

### Full Council, Sub-Committees and Workgroups

The Full Council met on five occasions throughout the year. A number of key decisions were taken by the Council, such as the restructuring of the Minor Football Championship, the appointment of Pádraig Ó Se as Games Manager with Responsibility for Football Development, the appointment of Seosamh Mac Artáin as Games Manager with Responsibility for Hurling Development, the approval of the Club Development Grant Scheme, the appointment of Seán Ó Braonáin as Operations Manager and Eóin Ó'Riain as Post Primary and Events Officer.

The Council's Management and Finance Committee met on 12 occasions. This Committee has responsibility for managing the day to day affairs of the Council, such as the approval of Club borrowing applications along with applications to purchase, sell or lease property. Over 30 such applications were reviewed in 2018 and forwarded to Central Council for recommendation. The membership of the Finance and Management Committee consists of Diarmuid Ó Suilleabháin (Cathaoirleach), Ciarán Ó Lidí (Runaí), Liam Ó Loineacháin (Leas Chathaoirleach), Piaras P Ó Murchú (Cisteoir), Antóin Breathnach (Oifigeach Caidreamh Poiblí) and Seán Ó Braonáin (Bhainisteoir Oibríochtaí).

The Council's Competition Control Committee met on five occasions and has responsibility for making arrangements for all fixtures. Certain responsibilities with the Club Championships are delegated to the Management Committee and this is for the practical reason of dealing with changes in venues and so on, which can arise at very short notice. Other responsibilities, such as discipline, are delegated to the Runaí through our Bye-Laws. Again, this is for the practical reason of dealing with cases in a swift manner in order to allow sufficient time for the process to operate. The membership of the Competition Control Committee consists of Diarmuid Ó Suilleabháin (Cathaoirleach), Ciarán Ó Lidí (Runaí), Liam Ó Loineacháin (Leas Chathaoirleach), Piaras P Ó Murchú (Cisteoir), Antóin Breathnach (Oifigeach Caidreamh Poiblí), Proinsias Ó Riada (Luimneach), Gearóid Ó Riain (Tiobraid Árann), Breandán Ó Tóibín (Portlárige), Ciarán Ceitinn (An Clár), Sean Ó Laoire (Ciarraí) and Marc Ó Siócháin (Corcaigh).

There are a number of Sub-Committees and Workgroups, who all undertake vital roles in helping to run the Association in Munster. All Sub-Committees and Workgroups presented a report on their year's work to the Full Council and a full report from each, along with the membership of each Committee, is included in the Convention Booklet.

For the record, the membership of the Munster Council for 2018 is as follows:

Table 3: Members of the Munster Council

Position	Name
<b>Cathaoirleach</b>	Diarmuid Ó Súilleabháin
<b>Runaí/POF</b>	Simón Ó Maolrunaí (Convention 2018 to May 5 <sup>th</sup> 2018) Ciarán Ó Lidí (May 6 <sup>th</sup> 2018 to present)
<b>Leas-Chathaoirleach</b>	Liam Ó Loineacháin
<b>Cisteoir</b>	Piaras P Ó Murchú
<b>Oifigeach Caidreamh Poiblí</b>	Antóin Breathnach
<b>Bhainisteoir Oibríochtaí</b>	Ciarán Ó Lidí (Convention 2018 to May 5 <sup>th</sup> 2018) Seán Ó Braonáin (May 6 <sup>th</sup> 2018 to present)
<b>Uachtarán</b>	Prionsias Ó Murchú
<b>An Clár</b>	Ciarán Céitinn agus P S Ó Ceallaigh
<b>Ciarraí</b>	Seán Ó Laoire agus Gearóid Mac Cárthaigh
<b>Corcaigh</b>	Marc Ó Siocháin agus Gearóid Ó Laighin
<b>Luimneach</b>	Proinnsias Ó Riada agus Pól Ó Foghlú
<b>Port Láirge</b>	Breandán Ó Tóibín and Seán Ó Laoire
<b>Tiobraid Árann</b>	Gearóid Ó Riain agus Séamus Ó Muineog
<b>Colaistí Triú Leibhéal</b>	Cathal Mac Cárthaigh
<b>Iarbhunscoileanna</b>	Liam Ó Mathúna
<b>Bhunscoileanna</b>	Tomás Ó hAiniféin
<b>Liathróid Láimhe</b>	Cionnaith Ó Chonbhuí

The Sub Committees of the Council, along with the Cathaoirleach and Runaí of each is outlined in table 4.

Table 4: Council Sub Committees and Workgroups

Committee	Cathaoirleach	Runaí
<b>Management &amp; Finance Committee</b>	Diarmuid Ó Súilleabháin	Seán Ó Braonáin
<b>Provincial Competitions Control Committee</b>	Diarmuid Ó Súilleabháin	Ciarán Ó Lidí
<b>Provincial Hearings Committee</b>	Donncha Mac Thomáis	Liam Ó Conchúir
<b>County &amp; Club Grounds Safety Workgroup</b>	Ciarán Mac Canna	Seán De Bhreitt
<b>Club &amp; County Administration &amp; Officer Training Workgroup</b>	Eamon Ó Súilleabháin	Micheál Ó Broin
<b>Referees Administration Committee</b>	Seán Ó Seasnáin	Caoimhín Breathnach
<b>Coaching &amp; Games Development Committee</b>	Liam Ó Loineacháin	Pádraig Ó Sé
<b>Inter-Firm Workgroup</b>	Micheál Ó Maolchathaigh	Proinnsias Ó Siúit
<b>Coiste Cultúrtha</b>	Marc Ó Siocháin	Micheál Ó Drisleáin
<b>Obair Ghrúpa Scór</b>	Tomás Ó hIarlatha	Gearóid Ó Dúda
<b>PR &amp; Marketing Committee</b>	Antóin Breathnach	Gearóid Ó Riain
<b>Fixtures Planners</b>	Eamon Ó Súilleabháin	Seán Ó Braonáin
<b>Club Fixtures Monitoring Committee</b>	Diarmuid Ó Súilleabháin	Ciarán Ó Lidí
<b>Munster Provincial Regional Handball Committee</b>	Micheál Ó Conchúir	Donal Ó hAodha

## **Game Development and Twinning with US GAA**

Games Development continues to be a core activity of the Council. The GAA needs to maintain a strong and vibrant Games Development structure, as we must work harder than competing field sports to attract and retain players. We don't have access to the massive appeal of international competitions that other organisations do. Therefore, we need to deliver the best coaching and games development programmes possible to our clubs and schools.

We are fortunate to have a dedicated team of over 40 full time people working in games development across the province. This includes 7 development officers working full time in the 3rd level colleges. The results are encouraging and areas, such as the annual Cúl Camps, which now attract over 48,000 children across the Province and the Provincial Activity days, which involved close on 5,000 children, are good indicators of the strength of the Association in Munster.

One of the highlights of the year was the US GAA finals in Philadelphia. A total of 105 teams participated in the finals, which is a very encouraging number. Many of these teams travelled thousands of miles to participate in the competitions and US GAA can be very proud of the superb organisation of the event. Munster GAA provides support to US GAA through Coach Education and Referee Education Initiatives and it is very encouraging to see the growth of the games in the US. Great credit is due to the officers of the US GAA Board, who work under major time and distance constraints to promote the games.

I would like to recognise the contribution of our Provincial Games Managers, Pádraig Ó Se and Seosamh Mac Artáin, for the work they do in overseeing games development across the province. This is an area we cannot be complacent on and must continue to invest in. I believe that Coach Education at club level, particularly at underage level, is of vital importance and this is one area I would like to see a continued focus on. It is essential that we provide every support possible to juvenile club coaches, as parents and children experiencing a positive and well structured environment in our clubs can often have an impact on the decision to stay with our games. The drop off at Youth Level, which is not unique to the GAA, is also an area of concern. This is another area I will work with our Coaching staff on to help address.

Pádraig Ó Se now has responsibility for development of football in the Munster and will be working with all counties to assist them in putting their own development plans in place. Seosamh Mac Artáin has the same roll for hurling. Both are well respected in games development and have many years of experience. I look forward to receiving updates from both as the year unfolds on progress in each county.

## **Finance**

The Finance Report, prepared by Sean Ó Braonáin, outlines a very healthy financial position for the Council. This is great news for our Club and County Board units across the province, who are ultimately the ones who will benefit through various grant initiatives and supports that are provided to them. We were fortunate in 2018 in that the Senior Hurling Championship Round Robin stayed competitive to the end and ensured that attendances remained high. That may not always be the case of course, so there is never a guarantee that this level of income can be maintained.

I wish to complement all six County Boards in the province, who all returned a surplus for 2018. It is most encouraging to see that all Counties are managing their income and expenditure in a prudent way, and great credit is due to each County Chairman, County Secretary and County Treasurer for achieving this. No doubt, it is a constant challenge for Counties to remain in the black each year,

given the costs associated with preparing County Teams and the costs associated with maintaining training facilities and so on.

The Council's Budget Framework, which is the funding model used to fund development and other categories at County level, has seen all of the €6,250,000 allocated in 2013 drawn down. €3,750,000 was made available to Corcaigh for the redevelopment of Pairc Ui Chaoimh, while €500,000 was made available to each of the other five counties. A further €1,000,000 was made available to Kerry for their Centre of Excellence project, resulting in a total of €7,250,000 being grant aided since 2013. As well as funding the redevelopment of Pairc Ui Chaoimh and the Kerry Centre of Excellence, other projects such as the Tipperary Centre of Excellence, the Clare Centre of Excellence, works at Cusack Park, The Gaelic Grounds, Walsh Park and Semples Stadium have also been funded through this scheme.

A number of categories outlined in table 5 totalling over €4 million in expenditure, give an indication of the ways in which the Munster Council funds the development of the Association in the Province. The funding outlined in this table comes from our own resources and we are heavily reliant on the Senior Hurling and Senior Football Championships to maintain income and maintain this level of expenditure. We continue to provide excellent value to our supporters, with under 16's free to 57 of our 71 match days and charged €5 for the remainder. 25-30% of the attendance at our games consists of under 16's and this is great to see.

I welcome the increase of €100,000 from Central Council for the Club Development Grant Scheme, bringing the total contribution to €640,000. That, with our own €490,000, brought the total value of the scheme in 2018 to over €1.1 million. The Clubs that applied for funding, did so on the back of €8 million of investment in their own facilities. This is an extraordinary level of activity and shows the vibrancy of the Association at grass roots level in the Province.

I would like to complement the Cisteoir of the Council, Piaras Ó Murchú, and our Operations Manager, Sean Ó Braonáin, for the excellent job they have done in managing the Council's finances over the last year.

Table 5: Categories of funding provided by the Munster Council

Category	Amount
Grants to Counties under 'Budget Framework' Scheme	€1,689,000
Field Rent to County and Club Grounds	€795,000
Club Development Grants	€490,000
Club and County Team Expenses	€398,000
Match Programme Profit Distribution to Count Boards	€227,000
Grants to Affiliated Bodies	€182,000
Third Level Colleges and Post Primary Development Staff	€152,000
Bursaries and Scholarships to 3 <sup>rd</sup> level and Post Primary Students	€75,000

## Fixtures

The GAA is a unique organisation. We are a two sport organisation, where many players play both sports, mainly with the one Club, but sometimes with different Clubs, and where players may play simultaneously with various teams in their Club(s), County and College/School. It is within this structure that we aim to provide all players with a regular programme of competitive games.

There is no doubt that the Intercounty scene has had a negative impact on the Club scene over the years and our difficulty here is that while we need a vibrant Intercounty scene to generate publicity and revenue, we also need a vibrant Club scene, as the Club scene is the core of the Association.

We are looking for the 'silver bullet' solution that will give us what the one code sport organisations can offer and that it is a fixture list that gives all players regular and meaningful games. Solutions that focus on one code will work in a large number of counties, but not in dual counties, and so there is a level of complication to this issue that needs to be recognised.

The purpose of the new structure introduced in 2018 was to create an Intercounty Championship Window and a Club Championship Window, as opposed to trying to play Club and Intercounty Championships at the same time, which might have been possible under the old system in a single code county, but complicated and unwieldy in a dual County. For example, I regularly saw County Fixtures Programmes that gave 3 date options for a round of Club Championship games, each one depending on the progress of the County Senior Hurling and/or Senior Football teams. Under the new structure, because of a definite period assigned to Inter County Championships and the season shortened, Counties were able to provide greater clarity to players on what dates their Championship games would take place.

I believe progress is being made. Several other decisions were taken in 2018 in order to help us streamline fixtures. For example, the Intercounty season was shortened, with All-Ireland Finals moving to August. Under 20 Football Panels were separated from the Senior Panels, meaning these fixtures could take place with no impact on each other. Minor was reduced to Under 17 to ensure that Minor Inter County games could not impact on adult Club Fixtures. Replays, which are very disruptive to fixture schedules, were removed from a large number of games. The merit of each decision has been questioned, but we cannot solve this problem unless we take some hard decisions, and more will need to be taken.

While Provincial Councils and Central Council have a huge say in helping to solve the problem, the solution also lies with Clubs and County Boards. A number of Counties need to radically change their own Competition structures. In Munster, the number of Clubs competing in Senior Club Championships and the formats used varies greatly. We have Divisional Championships feeding in to County Championships, we have Divisional Teams competing in County Championships, there are League Championship formats, 'back door' formats and knock out formats operating. We also have a huge range in the numbers of clubs competing in Senior Championships, the lowest being in Kerry, where there are 8 clubs in the Senior Football Championship, while the highest number is in Tipperary, where 30 Clubs compete in the Senior Hurling Championship. The enormous variance in structures at County level will make it difficult to put an Intercounty Calendar in place that pleases everyone.

While progress has been made, everyone accepts that more needs to be done. In my view, because of the nature of the Organisation, we may have to accept a system that is 'near perfect' and a lot will depend on what level of 'near perfect' all units and sections of the Association are willing to accept. Uachtarán Sean Ó hÓrain has indicated his intention to have a thorough review of fixtures later on in 2019, involving all stakeholders, and I welcome this initiative and look forward to participating in it.

## **Schools**

Primary and Post Primary schools across the Province continue to be nurseries of Gaelic Games development. Close on 1,000 primary schools receive regular coaching, while 494 children got the chance to represent their county in the GAA Primary Game, held at half time in the Senior



Championship games. The Post Primary sector is equally as active, with 620 games played across all competitions in 2018. We are very grateful to the many school teachers who give of their time to promote our games and coach children in the skills of Gaelic Football and Hurling.

### **Retirements**

2018 saw some of the GAA's top and longest serving administrators retire from their posts. Pdraig Ó Duffaigh (Ard Stiúrthóir), Siomón Ó Maolrunaí (Munster Council Runaí) and Prionsias Ó Murchú (Cork County Board Runaí) all retired. All three gave invaluable service to the Association and undoubtedly have left a lasting legacy. I would like to give a special mention to Siomón Ó Maolrunaí. I was lucky to serve as Munster Council Operations Manager under the stewardship of Simon. He was a top class administrator and respected throughout Munster and the Association. I wish him well in his retirement and the Munster Council will be forever grateful for his hard work and vision in his two terms as Munster Council Runaí.

I would like to wish new Ard Stiúrthóir, Tomás Ó Riain, and new Cork County Board Runaí, Caoimhín Ó Donnabháin all the best in their new roles. Both have taken on very difficult and challenging roles, but have gained valuable experience in the various roles they have had in the GAA over the years. I wish them both every success and look forward to working with them.

### **Chairperson of the Munster Council**

Diarmuid Ó Súilleabháin's term as Cathaoirleach of the Munster Council comes to close at our Convention. Diarmuid has served the Council with great distinction and has been a very popular and well respected Cathaoirleach of the Council. I want to complement Diarmuid for the superb job he has done and to wish him well in the future. He will be replaced by Liam Ó Loineacháin from Tournafulla. Liam will be a very able Cathaoirleach of the Council and like all those before him, can draw from a wealth of experience from a lifetime of involvement in the Association. I would like to wish Liam every success in the role.

### **Competition Sponsors**

I would like to thank our competition sponsors who provide valuable revenue to the Association and much needed exposure for our games. AIB, EIR and Supervalu (All-Ireland Senior Football Championship), Bord Gais Energy, Centra and Littlewoods (All-Ireland Senior Hurling Championship), Allianz (National Leagues), Electric Ireland (All-Ireland Minor Championships), Bord Gais Energy (All-Ireland Under 20 Hurling Championship), Eirgrid (All-Ireland Under 20 Football Championship), John West (National Féile Competitions), Kelloggs (Cúl Camps) and AIB (All-Ireland Club Championships) have been great supporters of the Association, along with many other sponsors.

Co-Op Superstores are now in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year of sponsoring the Munster Hurling League and their support is greatly appreciated. I want to thank Jim Wolfe, Dairygold CEO, for his continued support of this competition, which provides Counties with valuable competitive games in preparation for the Allianz Leagues.

I also want to say a word of thanks to JP and Noreen McManus for their generous contribution of €600,000 to the clubs of Munster. This wonderful gesture was much appreciated by our clubs.

## **Match Officials**

I want to give a special mention to our match officials, who perform the most difficult of tasks in officiating at our games. Officiating at games has become increasingly difficult in recent years given the public scrutiny that Referees are subjected to and there seems to be less acceptance that mistakes can be made. We may well be walking in to crisis in some years to come if we fail to recruit enough Referees to replace those retiring. There is always an increased demand for a greater number of games at Club level, particularly at underage level, and these games can only take place if a sufficient pool of Referees exists in Counties. A lot of work is being done to recruit, train and retain Referees and I want to recognise the work and effort of all involved in this. I welcome the publication of the National Referee Development Plan, and the Munster Council will be working to implement all recommendations.

## **Thank you**

There are a lot of people that I would like to thank for their assistance to the Council over the last 12 months. It is impossible to thank everyone, so apologies to anyone who I have missed.

Firstly, thank you to the Officers of the Council, who diligently carry out their roles and are always on hand to provide assistance and advice. Thank you too to all those who serve on our various committees and who do a lot of unseen work, from those managing the development and appointment of Referees, to those who organise and oversee appeals and hearings, often at short notice, to those who assist with stewarding, health and safety and other organisational matters for our major games, to those who assist the roll out of games development projects, officer education programmes and many other initiatives across the province. Their time is greatly appreciated and their work, while often unseen, is invaluable to the development of the Association in the province.

I would also like to thank the six County Secretaries in the province for their help and support over the last year. They do a very difficult job for the Association in managing the affairs of the GAA in their respective counties. A big thank you too to the various Central Council staff members who help us on a day to day basis in all aspects of activity, including fixtures, ticketing, games development, games administration, finance and so on.

Lastly, I would like to thank the staff of the Council (Ed Ó Donnghaile, Eoin Ó Riain, Maire Ní Mathuna, Nuala Ní Nialláin and Seán Ó Braonáin) who go well beyond the call of duty in carrying out their roles. Whether it is weekends or evenings, the staff are always available to do whatever is asked of them, always with great dedication and attention to detail.

## **Sympathy**

Over the last 12 months, many hard working and dedicated GAA people across the province have passed on to their eternal reward. Those who passed away include former Clare Senior Footballer, Michael O'Shea, Radio Kerry GAA commentator, Weeshie Fogarty, former Munster Council Delegate and Limerick GAA Officer, Rory Kiely, former Limerick Senior Hurler, Leonard Enright and US GAA Officer, Liam Hegarty. It is not possible to mention everyone, but all made a great contribution to the Association and the people of the GAA are forever grateful for their hard work and dedication. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a n-anamacha.

## **Looking Ahead to 2019**

2019 will certainly bring its own challenges, opportunities, excitement and controversy, as every year does. As already stated, the Munster Senior Hurling Championship is being eagerly look forward

to by our supporters and it has the potential to be another exciting and action packed competition. Our Senior Football Championship is undoubtedly in need of an injection of energy and hopefully, 2019 will see that unfold.

The new Minor Football Championship format, which is being trialled for one year, will see An Clár, Luimneach, Tiobraid Árann and Portláirge compete in a Round Robin format, before the winners move on to play Corcaigh and Ciarraí in a second Round Robin. The purpose of this change is to try and provide all Counties with meaningful games in a way that will help players develop.

2019 may well see the introduction of a second tier Senior Football Championship at national level. I certainly hope that this is adopted and becomes a success. The current system, whereby all counties start and finish in the same grade, cannot be sustained. I hope that the prospect of winning a Senior Championship (Second Tier) will give all County Panels a chance of success as opposed to certain elimination for many under the current system.

2019 will see many thousands of games played across the Province at Club, School and County level. Tens of thousands of players will receive many hours of coaching by Coaches in our 500 Clubs and in the huge number of Primary and Post Primary Schools that play our games. Our Clubs will continue to be hives of activity and the centre of their Community. Hundreds of thousands will attend games across the Province and many more will watch hours of live action on TV. There will be an uncountable number of meetings, phone-calls and emails to organise it all at every level in Munster. Millions of Euro will be invested by the Provincial Council, County Boards and Clubs in facilities development and games development.

As an Association, we do a lot of things well and we lead the way in many areas. The recent ban on Gambling Sponsorship is an example of that. We get things wrong too and there are areas we must improve on. The Association continues to make an immeasurable contribution to Irish Society. We can rightly call ourselves the greatest sporting and cultural organisation in the country and I can assure our members, that the Munster Council will continue to do all in its power to ensure that our Association retains this status in Munster.

Go raibh mile maith agaibh.

Mise le meas,

*Ciarán Ó Lidí,*

Rúnaí/Príomh-Oifigeach Feidhmiúcháin,

Comhairle Na Mumhan CLG.

**11<sup>th</sup> January 2019**