

## **Tuairisc Bhliantúil An Rúnaí**

I am pleased to present my report detailing the activities of the Munster Provincial Council in 2019, my second such report. The report will summarise the year's activities, with a focus on the various competitions that the Council organises, along with finance and fixtures.

### **Overview of the 2019 Season**

2019 was a very successful year for the Munster Council, with a vibrant Munster Senior Hurling Championship and many other keenly contested Competitions.

On the field of play, the Senior Hurling Championship was again the source of greatest public interest, with over 280,000 people attending the 11 games, or an average of 25,000 per game. While many of the games were not as closely fought as in the 2018 campaign, there were a number of superb high scoring performances, most notably Tiobraid Árann versus Corcaigh, Corcaigh versus Luimneach, Tiobraid Árann versus An Clár, Luimneach versus Portláirge and Luimneach versus An Clár. In all, the group games saw 23 goals and 500 points scored. 2019 also saw the return of Senior Hurling Championship action to Portláirge, with 2 home games played in Walsh Park. This was a welcome development for the County and a big boost to local businesses in Waterford City, with 22,000 supporters attending their 2 home games.

Tiobraid Árann blazed a trail through the competition, winning all of their group games, scoring 8 goals and 101 points in the process. However, on a glorious summer's day in the LIT Gaelic Grounds, it was Luimneach who continued their winning ways by capturing the Munster Senior Hurling title, in front of over 44,000 spectators.

In my view, the Round Robin format has been very positive for the promotion of the game of Hurling, not only in Munster, but in Leinster too. Hopefully this level of profile will impact the rest of the country in helping to grow the game. We live in a globalised sports world, with high profile games from numerous sports from across the world readily available for people to consume. The GAA needs high profile games too, but the Association is in a unique position in that the players that provide the high-profile games are also the backbone of Clubs, which we also need to thrive at local level. Fixtures will be discussed later.

Our Senior Football Championship, undoubtedly struggling to live up to its hurling counterpart, saw Luimneach claim their first Championship win since 2012, with victory over Tiobraid Árann. Corcaigh put their poor League form behind them to test Ciarraí in the Final at Páirc Uí Chaoimh, with the men from the Kingdom eventually running out 3-point winners, claiming their 7<sup>th</sup> title in a row.

2019 saw a very positive development in the promotion of female Gaelic sports, with Munster Ladies Gaelic Football Association games acting as curtain raisers to our Senior Quarter and Semi Finals. This can only be positive for the development of Ladies Gaelic Football, but also for the GAA itself. Clubs across the country have been reinvigorated and reenergised by the growth of Camogie and Ladies Gaelic Football, bringing new members and new volunteers to Clubs.

At U-20 level, Corcaigh provided Football in the County with a boost by claiming the Munster title, beating Ciarraí in the Final. In Hurling, Corcaigh and Tiobraid Árann served up one of the most memorable games of 2019 at any level, with Tiobraid Árann winning a pulsating contest with a last gasp score, in front of 9,000 enthralled spectators. At Minor level, Luimneach showed that the production lines are healthy in the County, capturing the Minor Hurling Championship title and playing in their 6<sup>th</sup> final in 7 years. 2019 saw the introduction of a new Minor Football Championship structure, with An Clár, Luimneach, Tiobraid Árann and Portlairge playing each other in a round robin system. This proved to be a great success, with all 4 counties getting favourable results. An Clár won the Final of this Round Robin and claimed the Daryl Darcy Cup. Ciarraí continued their fine run of form at Minor level, beating Corcaigh in the Final and capturing their 7<sup>th</sup> Provincial title in a row.

In all, the Council played 86 games in all Competitions, with 14 double headers and 58 stand-alone fixtures. These games attracted 371,000 spectators, with a further 69,000 spectators attending Central Council games in the Province that the Munster Council organised, such as the Ciarraí v An Maigheo Super 8 game, which was a superb occasion in Killarney.

I would like to complement our Event Controllers, Head Stewards, Stewards and Staff who work hard to ensure that all our games, no matter how large or small, are run in a safe and efficient manner for our patrons. We take our responsibility for the safety of players and spectators very seriously, and many hours of planning and organisation go in to making each competition and each game happen.

### **Performance of Munster Teams at National Level**

Overall, it was a very successful year for Munster teams on the All-Ireland stage, with 4 of the 6 main Inter-County titles making their way to the Province. Tiobraid Árann were outstanding in winning the All-Ireland Senior Title. The Premier County men bounced back from their Munster Final defeat to Luimneach to defeat Laois in the Quarter-Final and Loch Garman in the Semi-Final in what was one of the best games of the year. In the Final, they were unstoppable, beating their great rivals Cill Chainnigh and winning their 28<sup>th</sup> title in the process.

Tiobraid Árann were also outstanding in claiming the All-Ireland Under 20 Hurling Title, defeating Corcaigh in the Final in front of 18,000 spectators in the LIT Gaelic Grounds. It is the Premier County's 2<sup>nd</sup> All Ireland Title in a row at this level and is testament to the huge amount of work going on in the County. Munster Counties have dominated this Competition over the last decade or so, with 10 of the last 11 All-Ireland titles coming to the Province. An Clár have won 4 Titles, Tiobraid Árann 3, Luimneach 2 and Portlairge 1.

It is said that the darkest hour is before the dawn. This was certainly the case with Corcaigh Football in 2019. Relegation of the Senior Footballers to Division 3 of the Allianz Football League left the game in the County at a low ebb. However, by September, the Minor Football and Under 20 Football All-Ireland Titles had been claimed, with both teams playing an exciting brand of attacking football. These wins lay the foundation now for the continued development of the game in the County, and as I said in last year's report, Munster Provincial Football needs Corcaigh and Ciarraí to be strong. Both Counties served up many a classic game of football over the years and, hopefully, those days will return soon to the Competition in Munster.

With a small bit of luck, Ciarraí could well have claimed the All-Ireland Senior Football Title, pushing eventual champions Dublin all the way in 2 enthralling All-Ireland Football Finals. Both games showed us all that is good about the game of Gaelic Football, with both teams able to turn defence in to attack and vice versa, and both able to pick off outstanding scores. Ciarraí, on the back of winning 5 All-Ireland Minor titles in a row, possess wonderfully talented players, and surely it is only a matter of time before the All-Ireland Senior Football Title is heading back to the Kingdom.

At Club level, there was disappointment at Senior level, with Dr. Crócaigh (Ciarraí) being beaten in the All-Ireland Club Final by Cora Finne (Gaillimh), while Baile Mic Ghonair (Portláirge) lost out at the Semi-Final stage to eventual champions, Seamróga Baile hÉil (Cill Chainnigh). At Intermediate level, Cill Cummin (Ciarraí) became the 5<sup>th</sup> Ciarraí Club to win the All-Ireland Intermediate Football Title, while Rathluirc (Corcaigh) were unlucky to lose out in the Intermediate Hurling final. At Junior level, Lios an Phúca (Ciarraí) won the Junior All-Ireland Football Title, becoming the 9<sup>th</sup> Club from Ciarraí to win this competition since its inception in 2002.

I want to congratulate Ciarraí on their fine victory in the Junior Camogie All Ireland Championship. This win is a huge boost to the development of the game in the county. Congratulations too to Tiobraid Árann who won the All Ireland Ladies Gaelic Football Intermediate Title, their second title in three years.

Inter-County Competition	Winner
<b>Senior Hurling</b>	Luimneach
<b>Under 20 Hurling</b>	Tiobraid Árann
<b>Minor Hurling</b>	Luimneach
<b>Senior Football</b>	Ciarraí
<b>Under 20 Football</b>	Corcaigh
<b>Minor Football</b>	Ciarraí
<b>Junior Football</b>	Ciarraí
<b>Co-Op Superstores Munster Hurling League</b>	Án Clár
<b>McGrath Cup</b>	Án Clár

Table 1: Winners of Intercountry Competitions

<b>Senior Hurling</b>	Buiríos Uí Luíoch (Tiobraid Arainn)
<b>Intermediate Hurling</b>	An Athar Uí Néill (Corcaigh)
<b>Junior Hurling</b>	Fánaithe an Ruiséalaigh (Corcaigh)
<b>Senior Football</b>	Raonaithe Nemo (Corcaigh)
<b>Intermediate Football</b>	Teampall Nua (Ciarraí)
<b>Junior Football</b>	Na Gaeil (Ciarraí)

Table 2: 2019 Winners of Munster Club Competitions

## **Post Primary, Primary Schools and Third Level**

We are very fortunate as an Association to have so many people promoting our games throughout the educational sector. At Primary Schools level, there are over 1,000 schools in the province participating in coaching and blitzes, while north of 130 Post Primary Schools participate in the various Post Primary competitions, which saw close on 700 games played in our 2019 competitions. We have a very active presence in the Third Level sector, and UCC claimed a unique double, winning the Sigerson and Fitzgibbon Competitions. It is the 10<sup>th</sup> year in a row that the Fitzgibbon cup has been won by a Munster College.

There was success for Munster schools on the All Ireland stage. Borrisokane Community College won the Masita GAA Post Primary Schools Michael Cusack Cup (Senior C Hurling) final beating Colaiste na Coiribhe, while Patrician Academy Mallow over-came St. Paul's College Oughterard to win the Masita GAA Post Primary Schools Dr. Eamonn O Sullivan Cup (Senior C Football). Scoil Phobail Sliabh Luachra Rathmore lost out to Roscommon CBS in the Masita GAA Post Primary Schools Paddy Drummond Cup (Senior B Football) final, while Boherbue Comprehensive School lost out to Ballybay Community College in the Masita GAA Post Primary Schools Br. Edmund Ignatius Rice Cup (Senior D Football) final.

## **Full Council, Sub-Committees and Workgroups**

The Full Council met on six occasions throughout the year. A number of key decisions were taken by the Council, such as the decision to back the proposal to increase the number of Games Development Staff in the Province. Pádraig Seosamh Ó Riain from Portláirge became the Uachtarán of the Council. Pádraig has given many years of dedicated service to the Association at Club, County and Provincial level.

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 40 such applications were reviewed in 2019 and forwarded to Central Council for recommendation. The membership of the Finance and Management Committee consists of Liam Ó Loineacháin (Cathaoirleach), Gearoid Ó Riain (Leas Chathaoirleach), Diarmuid Ó Suilleabháin (Iar Cathaoirleach), Ciarán Ó Lidí (Runaí Comhairle na Mumhan), Piaras P Ó Murchú (Cisteoir), Antóin Breathnach (Oifigeach Caidreamh Poiblí) and Seán Ó Braonáin (Bainisteoir Oibríochtaí).

The Council's Competition Control Committee met on six occasions and has responsibility for deciding on arrangements for 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 Liam Ó Loineacháin (Cathaoirleach), Ciarán Ó Lidí (Runaí), Gearoid Ó Riain (Leas Chathaoirleach), Piaras Ó Murchú (Cisteoir), Antóin Breathnach (Oifigeach Caidreamh Poiblí), Proinnsias Ó Riada (Luimneach), Sean Ó Dubhghaill (Tiobraid Árann), Pádraig Mac Gráinne (Portláirge), Ciarán Ceitinn (An Clár), Sean Ó Laoire (Ciarraí) and Micheal Ó Beirne (Corcaigh).

There are a number of Sub-Committees and Workgroups, who all undertake vital roles on behalf of the Council, such as promoting Irish Language and Culture, managing the disciplinary process, managing the training and recruitment of referees, overseeing games development and so on. 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 2019 is as follows:

Position	Name
<b>Cathaoirleach</b>	Liam Ó Loineacháin
<b>Runaí/POF</b>	Ciarán Ó Lidí
<b>Leas-Chathaoirleach</b>	Gearoid Ó Riain
<b>Iar Cathaoirleach</b>	Diarmuid Ó Súilleabháin
<b>Cisteoir</b>	Piaras P Ó Murchú
<b>Oifigeach Caidreamh Poiblí</b>	Antóin Breathnach
<b>Bainisteoir Oibríochtaí</b>	Seán Ó Braonáin
<b>Uachtarán</b>	Pádraig Seosamh Ó Riain
<b>An Clár</b>	Ciarán Céitinn agus P S Ó Ceallaigh
<b>Ciarraí</b>	Seán Ó Laoire agus Gearóid Mac Cárthaigh
<b>Corcaigh</b>	Micheal Ó Beirne agus Gearóid Ó Laighin
<b>Luimneach</b>	Proinsias Ó Riada agus Pól Ó Foghlú
<b>Port Láirge</b>	Pádraig Mac Gráinne and Seán Ó Laoire
<b>Tiobraid Árann</b>	Sean Ó Dubhghaill agus Séamus Ó Muineog
<b>Colaistí Triú Leibhéal</b>	Cathal Mac Cárthaigh
<b>Iarbhunscoileanna</b>	Colm Ó hAodha
<b>Bhunscoileanna</b>	Tomás Ó hAiniféin
<b>Liathróid Láimhe</b>	Cionnaith Ó Chonbhuí

Table 3: Members of the Munster Council

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

Committee	Cathaoirleach	Runaí
<b>Management &amp; Finance Committee</b>	Liam Ó Loineacháin	Seán Ó Braonáin
<b>Provincial Competitions Control Committee</b>	Liam Ó Loineacháin	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>	Caoimhín Breathnach	Seán Ó Seasnáin
<b>Coaching &amp; Games Development Committee</b>	Gearoid Ó Riain	Pádraig Ó Sé
<b>Inter-Firm Workgroup</b>	Micheál Ó Maolchathaigh	Proinnsias Ó Siúit
<b>Coiste Cultúrtha</b>	Antóin Breathnach	Micheál Ó Drisleáin
<b>Obair Ghrúpa Scór</b>	Maighréad Uí Fhaoileáin	Gearóid Ó Dúda
<b>PR &amp; Marketing Committee</b>	Antóin Breathnach	Eamonn Ó Donnghaile
<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
<b>Planning and Physical Development Committee</b>	Liam Ó Loineacháin	Seán Ó Braonáin
<b>Games for All Health and Wellbeing Committee</b>	Ferghal De Graé	Gearóid Mac Conmara

Table 4: Council Sub Committees and Workgroups

## Finance

2019 was another successful financial year for the Council. The Financial Report, prepared by Piaras Ó Murchú and Sean Ó Braonáin, details the various income sources and expenditure headings. In all, an Income of €9,040,056 was recorded. We generate finance for one purpose and that is to re-invest in our units through capital development grants, Games Development grants, team participation expenses and so on.

We are very fortunate in Munster to have the Senior Hurling Championship, which last year generated 46.5% of our total Income and 78% of our total match day Income. Certainly, the decline in the Senior Football Championship Income from €910,555 in 2018 to €549,128 in 2019 is a worry, but our finances for this Competition are very much dependent on a Corcaigh v Ciarraí game.

Table 5 below outlines some of the headings by which we fund the development of the Association in the Province. The Field Rent amount of €777,406 is vital funding to assist

Counties, and Clubs to a lesser extent, to maintain their grounds. Running a large stadium nowadays is an expensive business, and between insurance, general maintenance, pitch maintenance, loan repayments etc, several hundred thousand euro is required to keep a ground open each year. Little, if any, of this expenditure can be cut. Pitches require constant professional maintenance to keep them in the condition that we want our top games to be played on, and great credit is due to all our Counties, who spend significantly in maintenance to ensure that the best playing surfaces are in place.

County Ground and Centre of Excellence maintenance is becoming a major difficulty for County Boards, with very little finance being set aside for future development. All grounds age, and all need upgrades, either in the short or long term. The Council may well need to look at increasing field rent amounts to help cover the costs associated with County Ground and Centre of Excellence maintenance. Ticket price increases may well be needed in order to fund this and other infrastructure projects in the Province, as we also need to continue to provide the same level of funding to vital areas of activity, such as the Club Development Grant Scheme, employment of Games Development staff, funding of Games Development projects and so on.

The Club Development Grant Scheme expenditure amount of €1,301,934 is of huge benefit to the Clubs of the Province. While €640,000 of this amount came from Central Council, €661,000 of it came from our own resources. This money assists Clubs to develop their own facilities and it is encouraging to see that a high percentage of it is being used for playing pitches, changing rooms and hurling walls. These are key facilities for the playing and promotion of our games. In 2019, GAA Clubs of Munster spent over €11 million on Capital Developments, which is an enormous amount and shows the level of ambition that exists in our Clubs.

An amount of €539,460 was paid out in team expenses to those teams participating in our Competitions and teams participating in the All-Ireland Senior Finals, and this is of huge assistance to Clubs and Counties with their own match day expenses. The GAA Player Injury Fund received €314,346 while all of the various Sub-bodies that we support (Post Primary Schools Committee, Cumann na mBunscoil, Third Level Committee, Ladies Organisations etc) received €264,263.

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.

Category	Amount
Club Development Grants	€1,301,934
Field Rent	€777,406
County Development Grants (Budget Framework)	€590,000
Team Expenses and Finalists Grants	€539,460
Matchday Programme allocations	€393,894
GAA Player Injury Scheme	€314,346
Grants to Sub Bodies	€264,263
Scholarships and Bursaries	€82,276
<b>Total</b>	<b>€4,263,579</b>

Table 5: Sample of the some of the Main Grant Headings

A County level, it was worrying to see two of the Counties of the Province record significant deficits for 2019. However, I am very confident that both Counties can turn the situation around and return to surplus for 2020, and Officers in both Counties are working hard to achieve this. Close on €8 million was spent by the Counties of Munster in preparing their various Inter-County teams in 2020, and that was up by €1.3 million on the previous year. Clearly, this level of expenditure is unsustainable.

## **Games Development**

2019 was another busy year on the Games Development front. Central Council and Munster GAA supports the employment of 27 county based GDA's, 7 Third Level based GDA's and 2 Provincial Games Development Managers. These oversee and organise a huge level of activity across the Province. For example, 48,986 children attended the GAA Cúl Camps across Munster while 10,000 Post Primary students participated in Post Primary Super Games Centres. Our Games Development Section also organises the Munster Poc Fada, Celtic Challenge, Croke Park Activity Days, Provincial Activity Days and Coach Education.

I welcome the recent Talent Academy report and would like to compliment Brian Cuthbert and Michael Dempsey on the great work that they have done. The report makes absolute sense. It follows on from the great work done by Pat Daly and the Games Development Department over many years in trying to move the Association away from the 'competitive win at all costs' focus at underage level to an Association that values participation and Player Development over winning.

In 2020 it is proposed to increase the number of GDA's working in the Province. Munster has one of the lowest Club/GDA ratio in the Country and plans are being put in place to address this. It is our intention that the new GDA's will see greater support offered to Club Coaches on the ground.

It is my view that the most important thing we do as an Association is Coaching at Club level. Most Clubs now begin Coaching at the Under 6 age group, so by the time a player will be playing at the Under 14 level, he/she will have had 8 years of Club Coaching. That is hundreds of times that a player has been coached by Club Coaches. It is vital that we provide every support to enable these Coaches to give children the best experience possible, to learn the skills of our games and to prosper. Club Coaches are the key people in the development of the player, the Club and the Association. Complementing the Club Coaching is the great work going on at Schools level. Again, the more support we can give Teachers who coach children, the better our Clubs and our Association will be for it.

I would also like to recognise the great work that is taking place in North America, which is twinned with Munster GAA. The US GAA Finals this year saw 114 teams participate and play 112 games over the weekend and this took an enormous organisational effort on behalf of US GAA to make it happen. The games continue to grow in the US and Munster GAA will continue to support this development. Great credit is due to all the Officers of the USGAA Board and people on the ground who work hard to promote our games, often involving long distance travel.



## **Referees**

I want to thank all of our Referees who have provided great service to us throughout the year in officiating at our games. Compliments too to our Referee Administration Committee, which deals with all refereeing matters in an efficient and well organised manner. Refereeing is a most difficult task and Referees deserve all the support and help we can give them.

We are in the process of completing a survey of Club Referee numbers in each County. The results of this will be available shortly, but indications are that some Counties may well experience referee shortages in the future, unless a major drive sees the recruitment of new Referees. We all understand how critical games are for Club players and how all players need a good balanced programme of games. However, we also need to keep in mind that we can only have these games if we have Referees to officiate at them. Over 17,000 Club games and blitzes were played in Munster this year, and this number is growing.

Undoubtedly, abuse by Players, Mentors and Supporters/Parents is a factor in keeping people away from refereeing. At underage level, we need a serious change in attitude from Parents, Mentors and Players. A lot of progress has been made, but much more needs to be done. The best service than any Team Mentor can give Juvenile Teams, is to behave like responsible adults and show good example to the children playing.

## **Wheelchair Hurling**

I would like to congratulate the Munster Wheelchair Hurling team on their fine win in the All-Ireland series. Wheelchair Hurling was started a few years ago in Munster and has gone from strength to strength under the great guidance of the Games For All/Health and Wellbeing Committee. Munster GAA is delighted to support this team and this very worthwhile initiative, and I wish the team every success for the future.

## **Fixtures**

Fixtures is undoubtedly the GAA's greatest and most difficult challenge. We are a unique sporting organisation for many reasons, but we are certainly unique in that our Players play across codes and across levels, often at the same time. Hence the fixtures problem that we have.

The recently published report of the Fixtures Review Taskforce will undoubtedly generate a huge amount of debate in the coming months, and while it will be difficult to get universal approval for all recommendations, there are many worthwhile proposals in the report. These include abolishing the All-Ireland Junior Football Championship, finishing All-Ireland Post Primary A and B Schools Finals earlier, abolishing All-Ireland Post Primary Finals at C and D grades, designating Under 17 Inter-County level as a Developmental grade, decoupling Under 20 Panels from Senior Panels, removing the All-Ireland Semi-Finals from the Under 20 Hurling Championship and putting a cap on the number of teams that can participate in County Senior and Intermediate Championships.

It is difficult to see the value of the proposal to remove the Provincial U20 Hurling Championship in terms of Club fixtures, as the current format can be completed in 4 dates by removing the All Ireland Semi Finals. The provincial competitions at this grade have

provided many fine games and occasions over the years, and are still a favourite with the public and players alike.

The Munster Council Management Committee submission to the Task Force recommended a split Championship season, with Inter County Championships taking place in May, June and July, and Club Championships taking place in August, September and October, with July also available to counties knocked out early from Inter County Championship action. Club Leagues and challenge games would be played in April through to July, meaning each player would have a league/challenge game programme from April to July and a Championship programme from August to October. Inter-County Players would not be moving back and forth from one Coaching set-up to another and Clubs would have their players for an entire Championship block of two to three months. The Task Force was not in favour of this approach and instead favours a number of options, including 'split windows', whereby Club Championship activity is split over multiple windows, or Spring and September/October windows.

I respect the views of the Taskforce as they had to consider numerous submissions and inputs from various stakeholders. They have put forward 3 proposals on the structure of the Inter County Football Championships, including retaining the status quo, redrawing the Provincial Football Championship structure to see 8 counties per competition, and moving the Provincial Championships to the spring-time, thus decoupling them from an All-Ireland league style Championship. Certainly, the latter will effectively see the end of Provincial Championship structure as we know it, as the competitions will essentially become warm up competitions.

The key now is that we take the decisions as an Association that we need to take in order to improve the Fixture Programme for the Club player and reduce the burden on the elite player. All parties to the debate must accept that because of the nature of the Association, it is going to be very difficult to deliver the 'silver bullet solution' and so, compromises will be needed. All discussion on the best Championship format needs to take place in the context of the positive impact the proposed change will have on the schedule of the Club and elite player.

It should also be remembered, that while the Munster Senior Football Championship has lived in the shadow of its hurling counterpart, Ulster and Connacht Football Championships are very competitive, both having had 3 different winners in the last 5 years.

### **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), Bórd Gáis Energy, Centra and Littlewoods (All-Ireland Senior Hurling Championship), Allianz (National Leagues), Electric Ireland (All-Ireland Minor Championships), Bórd Gáis 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 4th year of sponsoring the Munster Hurling League and their support is greatly appreciated. The Sponsorship has given the Competition increased

profile, and all 6 Counties in Munster are regular entrants now. It is particularly positive to see Ciarraí enter each year. I want to thank Jim Wolfe, Dairygold CEO, for his continued support of this Competition.

### **Appreciation**

Two of our current Officers, Antóin Breathnach (Oifigeach Caidreamh Poiblí) and Piaras Ó Murchú (Cisteoir) will be leaving the Council at Convention. Antóin has served 2 terms as an Officer of the Council, one as Cisteoir and one as Oifigeach Caidreamh Poiblí (current), while Piaras has served his term as Council Cisteoir. Both officers have given sterling service and commitment to the Council and deserve great praise for the way they have carried out the roles assigned to them. I wish both well for the future.

### **Thank You**

Each year, it takes a huge effort from many people to enable to Council to carry out its role. It is not possible to mention everyone in this report, so apologies to any group or people that 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 Workgroups. Their time is greatly appreciated and their work, while often unseen, is invaluable. These Committees and Workgroups meet on numerous occasions during the year and carry out various roles on behalf of the Council.

I would also like to thank the six County Secretaries in the Province for their help and support over the last year. We are very fortunate in the Province to have the calibre of County Secretary that we have, and they do an enormous amount of work for the Association, often in difficult circumstances.

Lastly, I would like to thank the staff of the Council (Eamonn Ó Donnghaile, Eoin Ó Riain, Máire Ní Mathúna, Nuala Ní Nialláin, Seán Ó Braonáin, Padraig Ó Sé & Seosamh MacArtáin) who go well beyond the call of duty in carrying out their roles.

### **Looking Ahead to 2020**

2020 will bring challenges and opportunities as every year does. Supporters are already looking forward to our Senior Hurling Championship, and the opening weekend, with Corcaigh playing 2018 All Ireland Champions Luimneach, and Portlairge taking on 2019 All Ireland Champions Tiobraid Árann, will certainly get the championship off to a flying start. 2020 will also see the first non Corcaigh v Ciarraí Munster Senior Football Final since 2016, and at National level, a new 2<sup>nd</sup> Tier Football Championship will begin. I sincerely hope this is a great success and that Counties give it the respect that it deserves. This will provide many players with an opportunity to taste Championship success on the National stage, while also giving those players a shot at the First Tier Championship. Surely a chance at winning a 2<sup>nd</sup>

Tier Championship is better than almost certain defeat and exit from the first tier Championship, under the system that was in place.

Ciarraí will play in the Munster Under 20 Hurling Championship and it is the first time since 2014 that a team from Ciarraí has entered a Munster Championship. A lot of work is being done in the County to promote and grow the game of Hurling and the decision to enter the Under 20 Championship is a positive one. I wish the Players and Management every success. 2020 will also see another positive development in the promotion of Ladies Gaelic Games, as the Munster Senior LFGA Final will be played before the Corcaigh v Ciarraí Munster Senior Football Semi-Final at Páirc Uí Chaoimh. This will be a great opportunity to promote the game and I look forward to strengthening the links between Munster GAA, Munster LFGA and Munster Camogie in the years ahead.

2020 will hopefully see the start of the redevelopment of Walsh Park in Portlairge in to a modern 15,000 capacity grounds, with facilities for players and spectators. I welcome the recent Government grant of €3.75 million, which is a huge boost to the project. The redevelopment is badly needed, and I wish the Officers of the County Board every success in making it happen. The Munster Council will also be contributing €1 million to the project.

A motion is before our Convention to introduce an ‘Audit and Risk Committee’. This Committee will oversee Financial processes and set out areas of risk to the Council and to the Association in Munster. It will advise and make recommendations to the Finance and Management Committee on all aspects of Financial Management and Governance. Governance is a key area and we must take all possible steps to ensure that we are managing our Finances and managing risks in the best way possible.

Finally, the GAA in Munster is in a healthy place. We have 470 clubs and almost 7,000 teams registered to the GAA Player Injury Fund. There are 1,000 Primary Schools involved in Gaelic Games and 150 Post Primary Schools. Undoubtedly, we face many challenges, such as rural depopulation, urbanisation, fixtures, increasing costs of maintaining facilities and County Teams, recruitment of Referees etc. However, there is a huge amount of work going on around the Province, supported by an army of dedicated volunteers and a small and dedicated full time Games Development and Administration staff. Our aim for 2020 and beyond is to continue to provide as much support as possible so that we can to keep the GAA as the number 1 sporting organisation in the Province.

Go raibh mile maith agaibh.

Mise le meas,

*Ciarán Ó Lúidí,*

Rúnaí/Príomh-Oifigeach Feidhmiúcháin,

Comhairle Na Mumhan CLG.

