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Public Statement

Winter Solstice to mark bleak year for Irish archaeology: Statement on Budget 2011 from the Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland

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As people in Ireland and globally watch events on December 21st in Newgrange and wait for the first light of dawn to penetrate the chamber of the famous Neolithic tomb, the Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland (IAI) notes that draconian cuts to spending announced in last week's budget will have a severe effect on archaeology in Ireland.

An unprecedented cut to heritage spending has been announced in Budget 2011. IAI is concerned that these cuts will have an immediate and long-lasting impact on the heritage sector and communities around the country and will mean that archaeologists and other heritage professionals will endure a bleak 2011.

Funding for the Built Heritage section of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government has been cut by 77% to €3.7 million. IAI believes these cuts will curtail the conservation of national monuments in state ownership, restrict the funding of research excavations through the Royal Irish Academy, and reduce interpretation for tourists at national monuments sites, at a time when our cultural heritage is being promoted as one of the drivers of our economic recovery.

The Heritage Council's 2011 budget has been cut by 47% to €4.5 million. Over the past number of years the state has made significant funding available to archaeology through the Heritage Council; these cuts imperil two flagship archaeological projects, the Discovery Programme and INSTAR. Both of these projects contribute enormously to understanding our heritage and bringing that information to the people of Ireland and further afield. INSTAR has been hailed as 'a spectacular success and a model for other countries to follow'. IAI is deeply concerned that the continued existence of both projects and some 40 jobs are in doubt as a result of the budget cuts.

The Heritage Council also funds many community-based projects around the country, which not only enhance the knowledge and pride of local communities in their heritage, but also ensures its preservation for future generations. This funding creates economic activity at a local level, it has been calculated that Heritage Council funding of €16,000 in Youghal, Co. Cork generated €480,000 for the local economy. The ability of the Heritage Council to support local communities is severely constrained as a result of the cuts.

The government has identified tourism, particularly cultural tourism, as a key element in the recently published *National Recovery Plan*, and is supporting this initiative with a 19% increase in funding for tourism product development through the Department of Tourism, Culture and Sport. However, it is illogical that funding leading to the creation of knowledge and awareness of our cultural heritage and the conservation and presentation of heritage sites around the country is being cut. It is akin to spending money on a new car but finding that you can't afford to pay for the petrol.

The Institute of Archaeologists of Ireland calls on the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to minimise the impact of these cuts in 2011 and seeks a commitment that the cuts will be reversed in 2012. The study of the past contributes, socially and economically, to our national recovery; these severe cuts inhibit that potential. Our archaeological heritage underpins a unique and sustainable tourism product that generates revenue for local economies.

Chair of the IAI Finola O'Carroll commented:

'On the day when our ancestors marked the ending of one year and looked forward with hope to the beginning of a new year, our profession, which has haemorrhaged jobs during the recession, faces into a new year losing more of our best and brightest young archaeologists and stopping in its tracks the creation of knowledge which enriches our understanding and appreciation of our rich archaeological heritage'.

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