

Standards Commission marks release of first annual report under Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015

First report issued since lobbying rules came into effect

Tuesday 28 June 2016: The Standards in Public Office Commission today issued its first annual report under the *Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015*, which commenced on 1 September 2015.

The report covers the Commission's activities in administering the Act for the 2015 reporting year, up to and including 21 January 2016, which marked the first registration and returns deadline.

Highlights of the report include a review of the Commission's preparations for the commencement of the Act, including the development of the online Register of Lobbying and the website www.lobbying.ie. Also included is a discussion of operations since commencement, and an overview of key issues encountered throughout the year.

The first returns, covering lobbying activities that took place between 1 September and 31 December 2015, yielded positive early results. More than 1,100 registrants submitted over 2,500 returns by the end of the deadline. An overview of key statistics is available in the companion highlights document, also published today.

Commission Chairman Daniel O’Keeffe said, “The results we have seen to date are a very positive indicator that there is an acceptance of the need for openness and transparency in lobbying.”

While generally pleased with the early results of the Register, the Standards Commission has noted some areas where confusion over the Act’s requirements persists, including:

- Determining whether a communication counts as lobbying;
- Ensuring that returns submitted are meaningful and contain sufficient detail to meet the obligations of the Act; and
- The obligation for registrants to submit a return for every relevant period, including a “nil return” for periods during which they did not lobby.

Head of Lobbying Regulation Sherry Perreault said, “This report marks an important milestone in the evolution of ethics regulation in Ireland. It is clear that our efforts to build awareness and understanding of the Act have resulted in the high level of registration and returns so far. While we are very pleased with the early results, there is still work to be done to ensure that all those lobbying are aware of their obligations under the Act.”

An incremental approach has been taken to the commencement of the Act, with most of the Act’s provisions in effect from last September. The Commission is now looking ahead to the commencement of Part IV of the Act, expected later this year. Part IV of the Act provides the Commission with the authority to investigate and prosecute contraventions of the Act, and to levy fixed payment notices for specific breaches.

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Background:

On 1 September 2015, the *Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015* commenced, and with it, the requirement for those who lobby designated public officials to register and report on their lobbying activities every four months.

Information submitted to the Register is available for public inspection at www.lobbying.ie. The website, which includes the online register, also has a suite of information tools designed to help lobbyists, designated public officials and the public to fully understand the Act and its obligations.

The Register is overseen by the Standards in Public Office Commission. In May 2015, Sherry Perreault was appointed by the Standards Commission to serve as the first Head of Lobbying Regulation.

