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R6 under Askeaton

GENERAL NEWS

Health report is met with stunned disbelief

By NORMA PRENDIVILLE



Part of the large crowd in the community hall in Askeaton for the meeting on the report into human and animal health in the area (CI)

THE sense of déjà vu was strong. How many times before had the community hall filled with the people of Askeaton, angry and anxious to have their concerns about animal and human health answered?

Last Thursday night, following the publication of the final report of the official, three-year investigation led by the Environmental Protection Agency, they again filled the rows and rows of seats and leaned forward, listening with tense attention as the presentation unrolled.

Not a single cough was heard as one after another, the four separate strands of the investigation were reported—soil and herbage, emissions and environment, animal health and finally human health.

Not a single clap greeted the end of the presentations. But the air crackled with coiled-up expectation.

The reaction came, slowly at first but building up inexorably into a tidal wave of disbelief. Then the anger spilled

over and the team of experts, led by Padraig Larkin of the EPA knew it was all over.

Despite all their graphs, their hundreds of samples and analyses and their presentation, they failed to convince the people of Askeaton. Nobody believed the conclusions.

"I would have thought it was good news for Askeaton," Dr Larkin said, given the conclusion that there was no Askeaton-wide phenomenon

But the audience clearly felt otherwise. They picked holes in the report, pointing out issues that had "dropped out" of the final report or animal

examinations which had disappeared or were ignored.

They poured scorn on the contention that normality had returned to the two key farms—Somers and Ryan—when taken over by the investigation.

And they were scathing when Dr Kevin Kelleher, director of public health with the Mid-Western Health Board, claimed the Geoghegan samples, lost by the board, had formed no part of the investigation.

It was ludicrous to suggest any form of cover-up, Dr Larkin insisted more than once, and they were not blaming the farmers for the problems. But his

statements found no believers.

The most heated moments of the five-hour-long meeting came when Cllr David Naughton, a member of the Askeaton / Ballysteen Animal Health Committee, called on Dr Kelleher to resign. Dr Kelleher was in charge of the human health investigation.

Cllr Naughton said it was unbelievable that 17 human bodily samples could go missing and no-one was being held accountable. "Are you going to resign?" he demanded of Dr Kelleher. "I call on you now to resign".

"There was never any

intention on the human side to take blood samples," Dr Kelleher said. "We had no reason to do so and to have done so would have been inappropriate."

"The report isn't worth the paper it is written on," declared Liam Somers while IFA's John Slattery said the "question tonight is on the credibility of the report."

The debate continued long into the night but nobody left satisfied.

The animal health committee intends to study the report in full detail and along with the IFA intends to send it for independent evaluation and analysis.