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## Irish Tourist Industry Confederation

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## Tourism Statistics Review

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## Executive Summary

### *Introduction*

TTC was commissioned by ITIC to undertake a short review of Irish tourism statistics and make recommendations. The review followed the withdrawal last year of monthly tourism data by the CSO and concern that there were other delays in the production of tourism statistics. TTC wishes to thank the CSO and Fáilte Ireland for their help and assistance during this review and those who contributed to our consultations and user survey.

### *The Current Position*

*Monthly Data* – The CSO suspended the provision of monthly data on country of origin in June 2010. This series had been introduced in 2005 and prior to that date results were only published quarterly. Between 2005 and 2009 the number of interviews carried out in the Country of Residence Survey was halved due to fewer enumerators being available to carry out interviews. This was due to retirements and the difficulty in public sector recruitment. The effect of the decreased sample was to raise concerns over the confidence limits of the survey at monthly country level. Sampling error had risen sharply and in some cases the co-efficient of variation was over 20% whereas CSO is rightly reluctant to publish any data with a co-efficient of variation of over 5%. Accurate statistics are essential.

There is likely to be a resumption of monthly data limited only to key markets – GB, Europe, North America and Other Areas reverting in effect to the pre-2005 position. This matches the level of provision in other countries.

*Quarterly Data* – The CSO introduced changes to the methodology of its Passenger Card Inquiry in early 2010 related to country of residence and nationality. These were essential changes to cover concerns re misunderstanding of questions by migrants and transit passengers. The results are now being worked through and mean that this has delayed the production of quarterly data and is leading to a review of 2009 figures as well. It is unfortunate that this change coincided with the monthly data problems.

*Household Travel Survey* – This survey provides the basis of Irish residents travel internally and externally. This survey too had a methodological change in 2010 resulting again in delayed publication of results while anomalies were sorted out. Here the key change related to the introduction of a one month instead of three month recall of trips – which will lead to more accuracy in the data provided.

*Summary* - The delays in provision of statistics are understandable if unfortunate and methodological changes will enhance accuracy of all figures. The ending of detailed monthly country of origin data is also understandable and was done for sound reasons of ensuring accuracy. Better communication of the rationale and need for this would have been helpful.

There will be provision of limited monthly data in due course when the overall tourism statistics are brought up to date. CSO recognises the importance of the need to introduce certainty of timing once again and to confirm its intention to restore soon monthly provision for a focused group of source markets.

With regard to cross border co-operation there is close liaison between Fáilte Ireland, NITB and now NISRA which assists greatly in the understanding and calculations relating to tourism movement across the island.

### *EU Directive*

Currently all EU member states adhere to Council Directive 95/97/EC on tourism statistics. Ireland complies fully with this directive and provides statistics for tourism above and beyond the Directive. The proposed new Directive will place additional demands on CSO to provide further tourism statistics. These will cover same-day visits or day trips; further data on tourism participation and as an option – nights spent in non-rented accommodation (VFR, time share, second homes). Other detail is needed to be provided on capacity and demand.

This draft Directive had been expected to increase obligations relating to developing Tourism Satellite Accounts but this has been removed from the Draft. However the requirement to carry out day trip surveys will fill one gap in potential TSA provision.

CSO and Fáilte Ireland are well prepared to meet the requirements of the changes to the EU requirements.

### *Users Perspective*

As part of the review process face to face interviews were carried out and an on-line survey undertaken of ITIC members. This achieved a good response rate of 60%. The survey revealed that almost 95% of respondents considered tourism statistics as Very Important or Important to their business planning. Respondents were asked to identify which statistics were most important to their businesses and Fáilte Ireland's Annual Tourism facts topped the poll followed by the CSO's Annual Data. On the other hand the CSO's Monthly Nationality Data – which had been the subject leading to this review - was ranked least important of the seven data sets offered. Respondents were further asked to indicate how much they used the data and once again the FI Annual Tourism Facts was top of the poll being used Frequently or From Time to Time by 86% of respondents.

When asked to identify gaps and issues related to tourism statistics there was quite a limited response which reflected speciality interests – for example coach touring. A minority was very concerned at the ending of the monthly nationality data – particularly at a time when the industry was under severe pressure. There was a view too that statistics must be produced more quickly than at present.

### *Conclusions & Recommendations*

#### ➤ Priorities

The priority for tourism data users is often timeliness with the expectation of accuracy taken for granted. There is a dichotomy here and it must be stated that accuracy cannot be sacrificed to speed up publication of statistics. Inaccurate statistics lead to poor decision making. This is particularly the case with smaller markets where major swings can be seen as sample sizes are small. Accuracy must take priority – but agencies equally have a need to use their best endeavours to meet industry needs in a timely fashion.

#### ➤ Improvements

Within the current constraints it will not be possible for CSO to go back to the monthly publication of detailed country data. It is recommended that the CSO should release at least the following data on a monthly basis:

- Total Visitors;
- GB Visitors;
- Rest of Europe Visitors;
- North America Visitors;
- Rest of World Visitors.

This would be a welcome move by CSO and help the industry in its forward planning substantially.

It would be a similar level of detail as that provided by the UK for example. Depending on CSO work, it may be possible to widen this to show France and Germany separately as well.

The UK provides tourism statistics within six weeks from the end of a survey period – Spain takes three weeks. It is recommended that CSO should aim to match the Spanish time standards.

It is recommended that CSO should aim to reduce the lapsed time to make the quarterly information available to less than ten weeks to make this information more useful to the industry.

The existing methodologies of all the major tourism surveys are sound and meet best practice internationally. There is no quick fix solution to bring back monthly data by country. It is not affordable now. Tourism Ireland's initiative to provide alternative performance indicators should be supported and if found viable given a priority in resourcing.

#### ➤ Other Issues

Major reviews of tourism statistics were undertaken in GB in 2004 and in Northern Ireland in 2005. It is recommended that a similar detailed review be carried out in Ireland to examine the issues that arise from this report and which can focus on industry, national and EU needs for the next two decades.

Tourism Satellite Accounts – TSA's have dropped down the priority list of most countries in the current economic climate. The new EU Directive had been expected to make some reference to the development of TSA's but this has now been dropped. The new requirement to provide same day trip data will help the TSA process by filling in one of the missing data sets. There is no pressure to further develop TSA's at this time but both the Department and CSO would welcome industry views on the priority that should be given to TSA's.

Outsourcing – Third Party Assistance – there is no evidence that the CSO's work could be outsourced effectively. A sample size of 600,000 is needed and examination of the approach taken by other countries shows that this is essential and most easily achieved by a state body. Equally the CSO and Fáilte Ireland surveys complement each other with the latter contracted out and in 2010 having its sample reduced because of budgetary constraints. New methods of data collection from mobile phones and credit cards should be investigated fully.

There is potential to share more widely the monthly data supplied by carriers to Fáilte Ireland if the companies concerned were agreeable.

Employment - Labour market statistics were not covered in this review. Ongoing debate on tourism employment indicates that this is a subject to be prioritised in any future work in the area of tourism statistics reviews.

Northern Ireland – Cross border co-operation on tourism statistics has been both essential and of mutual benefit – and of good quality. With the Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (NISRA) having taken over responsibility for tourism statistics from NITB there may be an opportunity to utilise their new data sets to improve the Northern Ireland input into CSO national tourism data.

#### ➤ Tourism Renewal Implementation Group

This Group has reviewed the draft report and provided essential feedback. It is recommended that the Group should hold an ongoing brief on the subject to provide insight into a range of subjects in this field.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

TTC was appointed by ITIC to undertake a short review of tourism statistics issues following some unease after the withdrawal of monthly tourism data by the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

The current difficulties surrounding the performance of the tourism industry have highlighted the need for regular accurate data relating to industry performance particularly in key markets so that adjustments to marketing plans and delivery mechanisms can be made in time to have an appropriate effect.

The withdrawal of monthly market data and the delay in production of all other tourism data by CSO has caused some concern across the industry.

### 1.2 Significance

Because of the fragmented nature of the tourism industry there is a reliance on overall aggregated performance data to provide an assessment about how the industry is performing at any given time. This is particularly important for national tourism agencies whose generic campaigns are not necessarily reflected in measurable bookings and who need to know campaign outcomes through the results obtained in actual numbers visiting. A delay in obtaining timely results means that adjustment action may be too late or ineffective.

The raw data of aggregate numbers travelling in and out of the country by air and sea is not alone sufficient to give an accurate picture of performance as origin data will not be available – meaning that increases and decreases may be driven by Irish people travelling more or less and not through visitor activity to the country.

The provision of detailed monthly numbers by country was welcomed widely in 2005 when first provided. It is the withdrawal of this data set by CSO because of concerns over its accuracy that has led to the present review. However of equal, if not more importance, is the current hopefully short term delay in the provision of all tourism performance data from CSO. The reasons here are different to the monthly issue but relates once again to accuracy versus timing. The latter is hopefully a short term difficulty.

Although this review covers ROI only the tourism statistics for all-island tourism rely heavily on and are interwoven with good co-operation between the relevant bodies on both sides of the border. This issue is considered briefly in the report.

### 1.3 Terms of Reference

The Review Objectives include:

- Review of the obligations with regard to the EU Directive on Provision of Tourism Statistics as well as meeting National Statistics standards and obligations as appropriate.
- Review currently deployed methodology to identify possible improvements.
- Provide insight into best international practice.
- Define the required level of reliability/robustness for purpose.
- Specify the level of sub-analysis (i.e. source markets and distribution within Ireland) as well as timeliness of reporting required to meet end users' needs.

- Identify monitoring and evaluation requirements, including usefulness/appropriateness for the development of Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSA) and other economic impact models.
- Explore opportunities for collaboration and cost effective methodologies for delivery of required data.

#### 1.4 Methodology

The review was carried out using a mixture of desk research, consultative meetings and an on-line survey. Added to this was our experience of the subject in other countries. TTC is grateful to the CSO team in particular for meeting so willingly and openly and for providing a thorough briefing on the issues involved. TTC also acknowledges the input of the ITIC members who participated in the on-line survey and gave their views and opinions on the subject.

## 2. Ireland's Tourism Data Methodologies

### 2.1 Overview

Ireland's tourism data is provided by a range of travel surveys which involve the co-operation of the CSO, Fáilte Ireland and NITB. There are 4 main surveys from which most of Ireland's tourism performance is assessed:

- Country of Residence Survey (CRS);
- Passenger Card Inquiry (PCI);
- Household Travel Survey (HTS);
- Survey of Overseas Travellers (SOT).

The first three are managed by the CSO and the results are published in 3 separate releases: Overseas Travel (which until recently was monthly), Tourism and Travel (published quarterly) and Household Travel Survey (quarterly). The SOT is managed by Fáilte Ireland who also manage the Hotel Survey and the Tourism Barometer, which provide further indication of tourism performance. None of these surveys, however, capture details of overseas visitors who leave via Northern Ireland or visits by residents of Northern Ireland; this information is provided by NITB from surveys conducted in Northern Ireland (and in future largely by the Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency - NISRA).

Below, we set out the methodology of each survey and, for the main surveys, a critical review and explanation of recent delays in data publication.

### 2.2 CRS – Country of Residence Survey

#### 2.2.1 Methodology

The Country of Residence Survey (CRS), began in 2000, and is a survey of all visitors either entering or leaving the Republic of Ireland via airports or seaports. It is carried out using Person Assisted Paper Interviewing (PAPI) by CSO enumerators at Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kerry and Knock airports, and at Rosslare, Ringaskiddy, Dun Laoghaire and Dublin seaports.

A sample of sailings and flights is selected designed to be representative of day and night sailings/flights and weekday and weekend sailings/flights. On the selected sailings/flights, a 1 in 5 systematic sample of passengers is selected and their country of residence is recorded. Sample results are grossed up to total passenger numbers provided by the airports and ferry companies. Delay in provision of data by these providers has a knock on effect delaying CSO data publication in due course.

Up until 2007, approximately 600,000 interviews were completed each year, but since then sample sizes have fallen markedly:

#### *Interviews Completed on CRS*

2004	585,000
2005	685,000
2006	665,000
2007	612,000
2008	468,000
2009	338,500
2010	322,700

These interviews are conducted with both inward and outward passengers and the main information captured, apart from details of the actual journey (e.g. port used, date, time of flight/sailing, direction, etc) is the country of residence of the passenger, defined as the country where he/she has resided over the previous 12 months. Approximately half of all passengers are Irish residents travelling overseas.

### **2.2.2 Data Publication**

Data from the survey have been published monthly since 2005 in a release entitled Overseas Travel giving details of the number of trips taken abroad by Irish residents and the number of overseas visitors arriving in the Republic. Prior to 2005 the results of the survey were included in the quarterly release Tourism and Travel. The Monthly Data at monthly frequency are therefore a relatively new addition to tourism statistics and followed a redesign of the CRS in March 2005.

In the monthly release, the numbers of overseas visitors were further broken down by their country of residence into 24 different source markets. (The CSO website also provides monthly information from January 2000 but with overseas visitors only broken down into 4 groups: Great Britain, Other European, North America and Other Areas). Between 2005 and 2010, the number of source markets shown on the release has increased to 35, mainly to break out more European markets (so it now includes separately 19 of the EU27 plus Norway and Switzerland).

In June 2010, the CSO stopped publishing the monthly data.

### **2.2.3 Reasoning**

This decision was largely the result of increasing CSO concerns regarding quality of the more detailed analysis, following the reductions in the sample sizes over the previous 2 years. The curtailment of the sample size came about because of a shortage of available enumerators to conduct the survey.

The CSO, in common with the public sector, is facing a recruitment moratorium. It is CSO policy to directly employ the interviewers (or enumerators as they are called) who work on CSO surveys. This is to ensure they are properly security vetted (as they work airside in airports), trained, and able to conduct interviewing to the highest quality. Enumerators leaving or retired (many have worked for CSO for a long time), were not replaced. For example the number available to work at Dublin airport in 2010, had fallen from 11 to 6 (including 2 part-timers).

The shortage of enumerators was further highlighted during the disruption to air traffic from volcanic ash in April 2010 leading to an increased use of sea routes; when the CSO was not able to adequately cover the seaports to assess the impact of the ash cloud.

The opening of T2 at Dublin has put a further strain on resources.

### **2.2.4 Critical Review**

Notwithstanding the fall in sample sizes over the years, it is still large and comparable with border surveys conducted by other European countries (e.g. UK, France and Spain). The survey is robust and well-controlled despite the challenges from the shortage of enumerators.

The decision not to publish monthly data was taken because of data quality concerns around some of the classifications. Although in 2009 the total annual sample was large, the monthly sample size varies (in line with passenger flow) so that in February 2009 for example it was just over 20,000.

Examining previous years' data shows that this may give very low sample sizes for some markets in some months. In 2009, for instance, of the 35 source markets published, 23 each accounted for less than 1% of the total overseas visitors and 14

accounted for less than 0.5%. If this is reflected in the sampling - making the assumption that half the sample is overseas residents - then in some months the published data will be based on samples of less than 50 passengers which would not provide the level of accuracy required to make any decisions.

For the purposes of this project, the CSO has provided a table showing a preliminary analysis of the co-efficients of variation by month for the CRS by source market for the first half of 2009 and 2010. Not only had these risen, many of them were double digit, which is not robust enough for CSO to publish i.e. with a co-efficient of more than 5%. Work on this at the CSO is ongoing as is work on a new sampling methodology to reflect the changes at ports (including T2) and the reduced resource. While this work continues CSO will not publish any monthly data.

### **2.2.5 The Outlook for CRS**

The CSO has been able to recruit 3 new enumerators, pending clearance to work airside (Feb11), which will ease some of the pressure.

It is possible, even likely, that CSO will be able to resume monthly publication of some data in the future, but it will not be at the level of detail that has been reported since 2005. At this stage, it looks feasible that levels of statistical confidence will enable a breakdown of source markets to at least show Great Britain, Other Europe, North America and Other areas (as was the case pre-2005), and possibly also France and Germany could be separated out.

All statistics will in future be published with precision estimates probably showing +/- variation from the figure.

## **2.3 PCI – Passenger Card Inquiry**

### **2.3.1 Methodology**

The PCI has been conducted by the CSO since before 1976 and supplements the CRS by obtaining data on expenditure, purpose of journey, length of stay and type of accommodation used for passengers entering or leaving the Republic of Ireland via air and sea ports.

A sample of flights and sailings is selected for surveying. This selection is intended to give an even representation of routes, day and night and weekday and weekend flights/sailings.

CSO enumerators are stationed at Cork, Dublin, Galway, Kerry and Knock Airports as well as the ports at Rosslare, Holyhead and Dun Laoghaire. PCI cards are distributed and then collected by enumerators once completed by the passenger.

There are six versions of the PCI card currently, one each for arriving and departing passengers travelling by air; sea as a foot passenger and sea as a vehicle passenger. The questions asked depend on the residency of the passenger and the direction of their travel but range from a minimum of six questions to a maximum of twelve questions to include purpose, expenditure, length of stay (including same-day visits). For non-Ireland residents - information on type of accommodation used is also collected.

In the past the CSO conducted a survey of passengers on rail and scheduled bus services to and from Northern Ireland but this was discontinued in 2003. The CRS distribution found in 2003 is applied each year to rail and bus passenger numbers. Expenditure has been updated to take account of inflation and total passenger numbers.

Sample results are grossed up to total passenger numbers travelling for each route type, as provided by the airports and ferry companies and to the results of the CRS.

The number of completed interviews on the PCI has also been falling in recent years:

### *Interviews Completed on PCI*

2004	482,000
2005	386,000
2006	383,000
2007	350,500
2008	341,200
2009	238,000

The results from the PCI have been published in the quarterly release entitled Tourism and Travel for over 10 years with a target of releasing the data 10 weeks after the month end. The last Tourism and Travel release was for Q4 2009 but in this case the suspension of data is not directly related to the falling sample sizes.

### *2.3.2 Reasoning*

Methodological changes were made at the start of 2010, when the question about country of residence was changed to asking respondents about both where they had resided in the last twelve months and their nationality. Previously, the difference between residency and nationality had been causing some confusion. There were also changes made to better capture the number of transit passengers (especially Americans, arriving in the Republic of Ireland, but heading for Northern Ireland).

The changes have led to identifying a greater number of migrants and transit passengers, with a consequent decline in the number of tourists. CSO is still working on this data and is not yet prepared to publish.

When it does publish it will also include a full re-working of 2009 to give comparable data. It is CSO's view that it will be end 2011 before 'normal' service is resumed although some preliminary data should be available in a month or so.

### *2.3.3 Critical Review*

A number of issues have been identified by the CSO and others. These include:

- The cards are self-completion which gives rise to concerns about accuracy of answers to some questions. The CSO has particularly tried to address the confusion among passengers between their country of residency and their nationality (many migrants still consider their home country to be their country of residence even if they have not lived there for a number of years). The CSO also believes purpose of visit data such as transits and migration has not been answered correctly. These changes have given rise to the delays and issues noted above.
- Collecting expenditure data at the end of a trip also gives rise to poor estimates, but this is still the process used by most countries as the alternatives (e.g. daily diaries) tend to be complex and expensive. (It is often difficult to capture passengers as they are leaving, particularly air passengers who wait in business lounges or do not arrive until boarding has started; incoming passengers, who are surveyed at baggage halls, are increasingly difficult to include as the rise of shorter trips and airline baggage charges means fewer people waiting to collect their luggage).
- Estimates for rail and bus passengers being based on 2003 data gives rise to concerns about accuracy and also completely misses the vast majority of cross-border traffic that goes by road.
- There are also issues with the comparability of data derived from the PCI with estimates derived from other survey sources: in particular the volume of overseas visitors' hotel bednights has long been an issue with differing estimates from the PCI and the Fáilte Ireland Hotel survey (see 2.6.2 below).

- There is some overlap between the PCI and the CSO Household Travel Survey which both provide an estimate of overseas nights spent by Irish residents and while the CSO says totals are calibrated to give the same figure, it admits differences emerge within purpose of trip, where the HTS records more holiday trips and fewer VFR or business trips.

## 2.4 HTS – Household Travel Survey

### 2.4.1 Methodology

This survey is designed to measure travel patterns of Irish residents involving overnight stays- both domestic and outbound - and has been running since 2001.

The HTS uses a random stratified sample. Although the target population is private households, the sampling frame used is the electoral register (as there is no household register). The individuals selected by the sampling process are sent a postal questionnaire which they are asked to complete and return detailing trips taken by any member of the household.

Since its inception, this survey had been sent out quarterly to 13,000 individuals (about 1% of the population) and asked households to recall details of all overnight trips which they had taken in the previous 3 months. It was felt that this may lead to some, shorter and more “incidental” trips not being recalled. Therefore, at the start of Q1 2010, there was a change of methodology to asking respondents only to recall all overnight trips from which they had returned in the previous *month*, which was run in parallel with the existing method for the first quarter of 2010. The new monthly survey has a sample size of 4,600.

The monthly questionnaire is eight sides of A4 paper and collects details of all members of the household and all trips (up to a maximum of four) from which any member of the household returned during the previous month. Trip details include destination, destination type (city, seaside etc), length of stay, party composition, purpose, main type of accommodation used, transport used, various booking details, and costs; for trips taken outside the Republic, the port of departure is also covered. Respondents are asked to return the questionnaire within two weeks of the end of the month in question. The weighting frame is taken from the Quarterly National Household Survey, so that household dynamics are catered for, rather than using the more static electoral register and the results are further weighted to agree with the results from the CRS.

Results had been published quarterly, normally 3-4 months after the end of the quarter in question, but there have been no releases since Q1 2010, which itself was not published until November, and was based on the last quarterly survey.

### 2.4.2 Reasoning

As expected the change from quarterly to monthly surveying has provided varying results. However some of the changes were unexpected and not yet fully explained. The quarterly survey ceased after Q1 2010, since when there has been only monthly data and CSO is still working on the reconciliation of the two methodologies so will not publish further data until the variation has been resolved.

### 2.4.3 Critical Review

The move from quarterly to monthly recall period is to be welcomed, as it is highly likely in trying to recall trips over a three month period respondents might forget a shorter more incidental trip. It has, however, caused difficulties in terms of continuity leading to the absence of any data since Q1 2010, as discussed above.

The CSO recognises that the HTS has weaknesses, not the least that it is a voluntary postal survey relying on self-completion. It is impossible, therefore, to have any control over who completes the questionnaire and there is no way to provide clarification or guidance if a question is not fully understood. On the positive side, postal surveys have the advantage of giving wider geographical coverage.

The sample size is reasonable, but response rates on the quarterly data had been deteriorating in recent years to around 40%.

## 2.5 SOT – Survey of Overseas Travellers

### 2.5.1 Methodology

The SOT is managed by Fáilte Ireland (but contracted out to a research agency) and has been running in essentially the same way for over thirty years. Its prime purpose is to provide greater detail on the characteristics of overseas visitors to Ireland and their trips. This has far more detailed information than the CSO is required to provide to meet the EU Directive but extremely useful to the industry.

Face to face interviews are conducted each year with overseas visitors, aged 15 years or over, who have spent at least one night on the island of Ireland; the interviews are carried out with departing passengers at the three main airports (Dublin, Cork and Shannon) and at the four seaports in the Republic. Routes are disproportionately sampled to ensure an adequate representation of all major source markets, which effectively means Great Britain routes are under-sampled and mainland Europe routes over-sampled to provide large enough sample sizes for detailed analysis.

In recent years the total sample size has been 10,000 per year, but in earlier years it was 6,000 and it will be returning to that level in 2011 as a result of budgetary constraint. The sample results are weighted by month, by route, and by country of residence using the CRS data (from CSO). Results of SOT are not published as such, but the findings are included in many Fáilte Ireland publications such as the annual Tourism Facts and information on Overseas Markets.

### 2.5.2 Critical Review

Despite returning to a sample size of 6,000 the SOT still provides a good sample, even of some smaller source markets on an annual basis because of the way it oversamples. It has the advantage of having the CRS data to use to gross up the results to provide reliable estimates.

It also provides important information that is not included in the CSO surveys including regional distribution, product usage, demographics (inc. *region* of residence in some markets), booking patterns and a more detailed breakdown of expenditure.

## 2.6 Hotel Review

### 2.6.1 Methodology

Fáilte Ireland has for many years published an annual Hotel Review based on a monthly occupancy survey. A panel of hotels is constructed designed to be representative of the hotel sector by grade and region; each month the panel is asked to provide information on rooms and bednights sold, including the country of residence of the guest. In the latest year (2009) the number of returns each month varied between 204 and 244, with an average response rate across the year of

72%. The results are weighted by month, grade and region and grossed up to the national universe which stands at approximately 900 hotels.

### 2.6.2 Critical Review

The methodology employed by Fáilte Ireland is a fairly standard approach used in other countries. The results from the survey do depend on having accurate data on the universe, which in most countries can be obtained from a compulsory register; however, the register is not always complete and may lead to some inaccuracies.

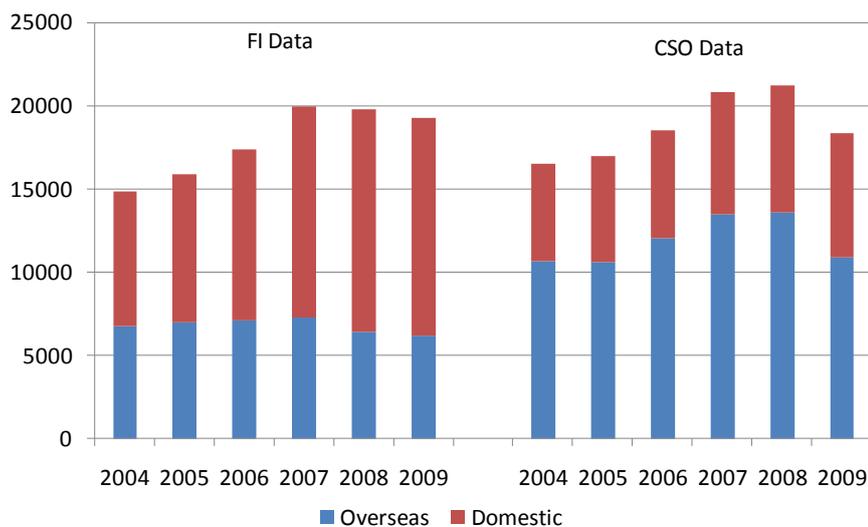
The survey is also dependent on the co-operation of the hotels, firstly in agreeing to join the panel and then in reporting each month. There is no means of ensuring that chain hotels are properly represented.

Accuracy also depends on the hotel completing the forms correctly and with full attention to detail.

As noted above, the CSO derives estimates of bednights spent in hotels both by domestic visitors (from the HTS) and by overseas visitors (from the PCI). These can be compared with the estimates of bednights given by the FI Hotel Survey.

While the overall total (domestic plus overseas) estimates are broadly similar between the two different sources, the FI survey gives much lower estimates for overseas visitors than PCI and much higher domestic visitor numbers than the HTS.

## Bednight Comparison



Despite many meetings over the years the reasons for this discrepancy have not yet been found.

Potential biases have been identified in both sources. The Fáilte Ireland survey has on its form, when asking about the guest's country of residence, the Republic of Ireland as the first option which may lead to an overstating; and there is the possibility it is the default answer by the hotel if for some reason the guest is not asked nationality.

Similarly the PCI has hotel as first option when asking overseas visitors about type of accommodation and the distinction between hotel and guesthouse may not be clear. (CSO is experimenting with a version of the PCI where hotel is the last option). It is possible that the three month recall on HTS has led to some understating of overnight domestic stays and this will become clearer when the monthly survey data is available.

The discrepancy might be less important if the trends were the same, but the PCI shows a steady growth in overseas visitor bednights between 2004 and 2008 before falling in 2009, while the Fáilte Ireland data has them broadly flat until a fall in 2008. Conversely, Fáilte Ireland show a rise in domestic bednights which is not shown to the same extent in HTS.

The resolution of this discrepancy is beyond the remit of this study, but we would urge further discussion and sharing of data, and possibly experimentation in data collection, to see if one can be found. The Director General of CSO has recently stated that the Fáilte Ireland data should be given higher credence as it does not co-mingle survey elements.

### **2.6.3 Other Occupancy Surveys**

There are other commercial studies of hotel occupancy and room rates such as those conducted by CityOccupancy/Savills and STR Global (which Deloitte's report). These studies are typically designed to provide benchmarks for higher-graded hotels. The CityOccupancy study, for instance is restricted to 3-star hotels and above; while it surveys around a quarter of all the hotels in this category and is useful for those operators, it does not provide a complete picture of tourism. Furthermore it is focused on occupancy and Revpar and does not report on the origin of guests. STR Global focuses on European cities and can provide Dublin hoteliers with a comparison of their performance in occupancy and room rates with other major cities, but again provides no details of origin of guests.

## **2.7 Tourism Barometer**

### **2.7.1 Methodology**

The Tourism Barometer is a survey of tourism businesses designed to gain an insight into the current performance of the industry and measure expectations for the immediate future. Each quarter 1,000 businesses across all sectors of the industry are interviewed and asked questions mainly about whether business is up or down against the same time last year whether they expect future business to be up or down.

### **2.7.2 Critical Review**

The Barometer is a useful tool for gauging the mood of the industry and therefore the overall direction of tourism performance, but is not designed to give any hard data.

## **2.8 Other ROI Data**

There is another important piece of information which Fáilte Ireland provides: each month it obtains data from the Dublin Airport Authority and the ferry companies, showing passenger numbers by routes, which it collates and circulates to interested parties on the grounds that it is not to be published. It is normally available by about the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month for the previous month.

This is a useful picture of the monthly trends, but it is not able to provide any detail on the passengers themselves, even how many of them are non-Irish residents.

## **2.9 Northern Ireland Data**

The surveys above do not cover overseas visitors who leave via Northern Ireland, which obviously includes Northern Ireland residents, but there are surveys in place which do provide information on these visitors.

### 2.9.1 *Overseas Visitors who leave via Northern Ireland*

The Northern Ireland Passenger Survey (NIPS) has been running for a number of years and is designed to provide estimates of overseas visitors to Northern Ireland who leave through its ports. Historically it has been managed by NITB, but has just been taken over by NISRA and is undergoing improvements to methodology and sample size. In the past NITB conducted 5,000 interviews each year with non-Irish residents who had spent at least one night on the island of Ireland who were leaving via any of the three airports (Belfast International, Belfast City or Derry) or the two seaports (Larne and Belfast).

Fáilte Ireland has a reciprocal arrangement with NITB, whereby it supplies details of overseas visitors leaving through any of the Republic's ports who had spent at least one night in Northern Ireland (as measured on SOT) and in return NITB provides estimates of those leaving via Northern Ireland ports who had spent at least one night in the Republic of Ireland, by country of residence and including the number of nights spent in the Republic. The exchange of data has tended to be on an annual basis.

In the past NIPS was only published after six, nine and twelve months each year, but it is understood that in 2011, when the survey comes under the auspices of NISRA, results of the survey will probably be published monthly, approximately eight weeks after the month end.

### 2.9.2 *Northern Ireland Residents*

Estimates of the number of tourist visits made by Northern Ireland residents to the Republic have also been provided by NITB using data measured by the UKTS (United Kingdom Travel Survey). The UKTS has been running for over 20 years although it has experienced various changes in methodology; the current methodology has been running since 2005 It involves interviewing 2,000 UK residents per week, including 60 per week in Northern Ireland, giving an annual sample size of approximately 3,000 residents of Northern Ireland.

Information on the volume and value of Northern Ireland trips to the Republic are supplied by NITB to Fáilte Ireland on an annual basis. Again there is a reciprocal arrangement and data from the HTS concerning trips made to Northern Ireland by residents of the Republic are provided to NITB.

It is our understanding that NITB have now withdrawn from the UKTS and NISRA will also be starting a new domestic tourism survey for Northern Ireland in 2011 to provide similar information.

The migration of tourism statistics in Northern Ireland to NISRA may allow greater incorporation of their data into national figures than was the case when produced by NITB.

## 2.10 **Conclusions and Ireland's position internationally**

The Republic of Ireland is well supplied with extensive and accurate tourism statistics compared to many countries. The advantage of being an island means that incoming visitors can be easily tracked, whereas in mainland Europe, countries struggle to record visitors coming overland especially from other EU countries. In Ireland cross border co-operation in tourism statistics gathering can be rated excellent.

France, -the world's largest tourism destination - relies mainly on data obtained from hotels to understand its source markets. This is supplemented with a quarterly border survey, which has a sample of 80,000 mainly at motorway service areas.

Spain, which is third in the league table of international visitors, behind France and the US, conducts a large survey at frontiers and reports monthly. Each year a total of just under 400,000 people are interviewed, at airports, seaports, and land border crossings. The data is reported monthly but limits itself to breaking out only 11 separate countries (10 European plus USA) each of which accounts for at least 2% of its visitors.

Italy, fourth largest tourist destination in the world, relies mostly on hotel generated data.

The UK which is sixth largest, like Ireland, has the advantage of being an island and so has its main visitor survey at ports/airports. Around 250,000 passengers are interviewed either arriving or departing each year, including British residents. It reports on overseas visitors monthly but confines its breakdown to those from Europe (subdivided to EU15 and EU27), North America and the rest.

Thus it can be seen that, compared to some of the world's largest tourist destinations, Ireland is well-served by tourism statistics. The sample sizes of its main surveys is comparable to other countries and few, if any, break out monthly data to the level that had been happening in Ireland from 2005-10.

The recent changes and delays to CSO publications have been due to valid technical concerns, and exacerbated by the moratorium on recruitment.

As with any national statistical office, the reputation of the CSO depends on the accuracy and reliability of its published data. It will, therefore, not hesitate to delay or even withhold the publication of any data where it may have some quality concerns.

There is therefore conflict between industry needs and the realities of the situation in terms of producing speedy and accurate data that provides a sound platform for decision making.

### 3. EU Directive/Eurostat Current & Future Requirements

#### 3.1 Overview

Every member state of the European Union is obliged, by law, to submit tourism statistics to Eurostat as determined by an EU Directive. The current requirements came into force in November 1995 when the Council Directive 95/57/EC was adopted. A significant revision to the Directive has been under discussion for a number of years and is now nearing completion, at which point the original Directive will be repealed and the new one come into force.

#### *Aims and Requirements of Council Directive 95/57/EC*

In the Directive, a number of reasons are given for its establishment including:

- The needs of users in both the private and public sector to have reliable and comparable statistics on tourism demand and supply;
- To assess the competitiveness of the industry by having greater knowledge of the volume of tourism, its characteristics, the profile of tourists and tourist expenditure;
- To ensure better the recognised role of tourism as a tool of development and socioeconomic integration, particularly at regional level;
- To assist public authorities and economic operators to develop more suitable strategies and policies for improving the seasonal spread of holidays and the performance of tourist activities.

#### 3.2 Requirements

The information required by the Directive is under 3 headings:

- The **capacity** of collective tourist accommodation establishments which are defined as: hotels and similar establishments, campsites, holiday dwellings and other collective accommodation.  
Data on establishments, rooms and bedspaces are required annually at national and regional levels (NUTS3)
- **Guest flows** in these establishments, including both domestic and inbound tourism  
Information on arrivals and nights spent broken down by domestic and inbound is required on an annual basis at national and regional (NUTS2) levels. Inbound is further broken down by country of residence at national level.  
Information on arrivals, nights spent and occupancy rates is required monthly for the nation as a whole with arrivals and nights broken down by residents and non-residents of the country.
- **Tourism Demand** measured as trips made by adult residents involving at least one night away from the usual place of residence and including both domestic and outbound tourism.  
Trips, nights and expenditure data are required as well as characteristics of the trips (including destination) and the number and profile of people taking the trips. Most submissions are annual (although include month of departure) and for the nation as a whole, although some top line data is required quarterly.

Thus it can be seen the only requirement from the Directive for any monthly data is on arrivals, nights spent, and occupancy rates but these are not required to be broken down by the normal country of residence of the guest.

### 3.3 Proposed New Directive

CSO has provided the draft proposal for the new Directive. The reasons for the need to update the Directive include:

- The changing nature of tourism, including the growing importance of short trips and same-day visits, the increasing importance of non-rented accommodation, and the growing impact of the internet.
- Improving the availability, completeness and comprehensiveness of basic tourism statistics as an input for compiling tourism satellite accounts

The new Directive will require, in addition to the same 3 headings of the current Directive, data on:

- **Same-day visits** Outbound adult trips and expenditure broken down by business and leisure to be submitted annually and domestic adult trips and expenditure, also broken down by business and leisure, to be submitted triennially. There is also an optional specification for a breakdown of outbound trips by country of destination, for all same-day visit expenditure to be broken down by category (transport, shopping, catering etc) and for socio-demographic breakdown of the tripmaker. However, the first reference year this data will be required is 2014 for outbound and 2015 for domestic.
- **Participation in tourism** The new Directive requires annually the number of various categories of overnight trip takers (e.g. any trip, domestic only, outbound only, 4+ nights etc) and non-takers. On a triennial basis reasons for nonparticipation (e.g. time, money, health etc) are required. All of these to be broken down by gender and age with further breakdowns optional.
- **OPTIONAL Nights spent in non-rented accommodation** (including friends or relatives, second homes and time-shares). An optional specification to be submitted annually and broken down by country of residence of the visitor for EU visitors. Visitors from outside the EU will be grouped together.

There are also several new breakdowns required for the existing 3 headings.

The **capacity and guest flows** data will have to be broken down by 2 types of locality for the establishment:

- Density of population (is it in a densely populated area, intermediate or thinly populated);
- Coastal or non-coastal.

There are a number of additional characteristics of trips taken required as part of the **tourism demand** heading. These include an annual breakdown of purpose of trip (leisure, vfr, business and other) and of expenditure by tourists (transport, accommodation and other). Also, on a triennial basis, type of destination (city, seaside, countryside, cruise, mountains, other) and booking details must be collected.

The focus of the Directive is very much on annual or even triennial data, rather than monthly data. The only requirement for monthly data reporting will continue to be for arrivals, nights and occupancy rates for collective accommodation establishments, with disaggregation between residents and non-residents.

It had been expected that the new Directive would introduce obligations in relation to Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSA's) see Chapter 5 below. These had been in earlier drafts but were later removed. The only new element which directly will assist the production of TSA's relates to Same Day Visits.

### 3.4 Implications

The Council Directive is enshrined in law and the top priority of the CSO is to fulfil its legal obligation to comply with EU legislation. The new Directive, with its obligation to provide additional data – notably that on same day visits or day trips - will put further strain on the CSO resources and may require new surveys. The CSO has already taken some steps in anticipation, such as adding additional questions on the HTS and is working up a Memorandum of Understanding with Fáilte Ireland to provide the supply-side data which are considerably more detailed and onerous. There is also the possibility of combining with other departments and the CSO is considering utilising a proposed new survey from the Department of Transport, which would monitor all forms of travel for all purposes, to collect data on day visits.

## 4. A User Perspective

### 4.1 Outline

As part of the review process TTC surveyed ITIC members excluding the state agencies to get an understanding of the role and importance of tourism statistics for business in the sector.

The survey was designed to assess the general awareness of tourism statistics and to ascertain the level of usage to which they are put by businesses. Later in the survey views were sought on the importance of individual sets of data.

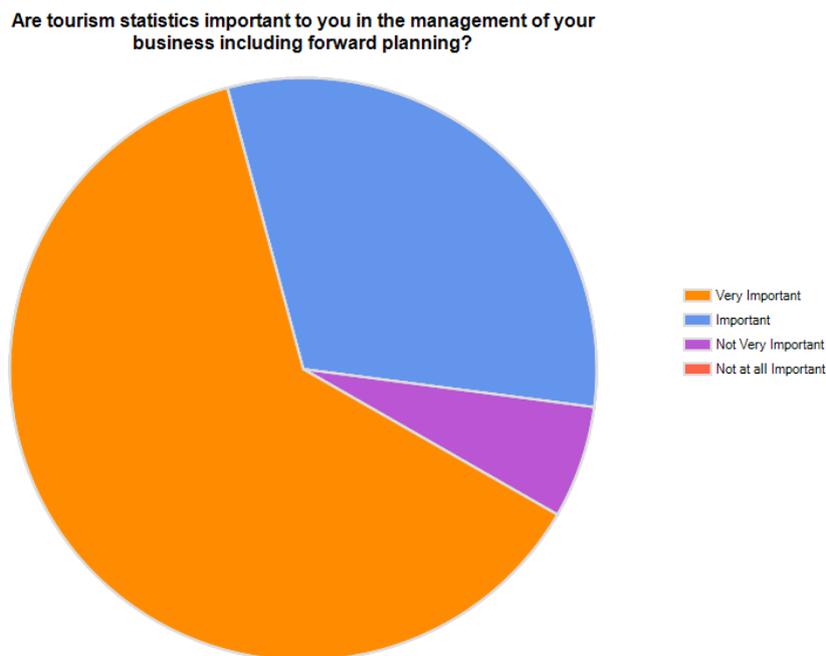
The survey was sent to 25 ITIC business members and 15 responded, giving a useful response rate of 60%.

### 4.2 Responses

#### 4.2.1 *How important are tourism statistics for businesses?*

63% of respondents considered tourism statistics to be Very Important for business management and forward planning. A further 31% who considered them important while only 6% considered them to be not very important.

**Fig. 1: Importance of Tourism Statistics to Business**



#### 4.2.2 *Unprompted Awareness of Tourism Statistics*

The responses indicate a good level of awareness of tourism statistics and some concern over the lack of monthly figures – but not extensively so.

**Please list below the tourism statistics that you make use of?**

The results varied in length and detail and are seen in this table. These are the actual responses received.

CSO  
 CSO monthly ( now quarterly ) overseas visitor arrivals  
 Household Travel survey  
 Monthly visitor numbers and source market statistics  
 CSO, Fáilte Ireland, HBC, City Occupancy.  
 Overseas visitors, Accommodation, Ireland market, visitor attractions, retail  
 Tourist numbers and spend  
 Fáilte Ireland visitor numbers.  
 Tourism numbers into Ireland , in particular into key gateways - market segments - visitor profile - visit motivations - length of stay - country of residence  
 Sot survey  
 Visitor Attitude Survey  
 COS - Tourism Agency annual visitor stats - monthly when they were available!  
 The overall stats provided by the agency broken down by overseas market, expenditure, business segments, numbers to regions within Ireland etc are all included in this.  
 CSO  
 Overall visitor numbers to Ireland  
 Numbers taking coach tours in Ireland  
 Facilitates market specific planning product and programme development.  
 ITIC Reports; CSO; Tourism Ireland reports  
 Visitor numbers to Ireland - broken down by source market; Arrivals to Shannon Airport; Numbers who visit key attractions in the area  
 Tourism Ireland; Fáilte Ireland; CSO; DAA Pax Nos

#### 4.2.3 Awareness of Key Data

Respondents were next asked their awareness of the key tourism surveys and out puts. The very useful Tourism Ireland Facts & Figures Annual Document was not included in the list as it provides data on an all Ireland basis and this study is concerned with the Republic of Ireland. The results in order of ‘popularity’ or knowledge are as follows:

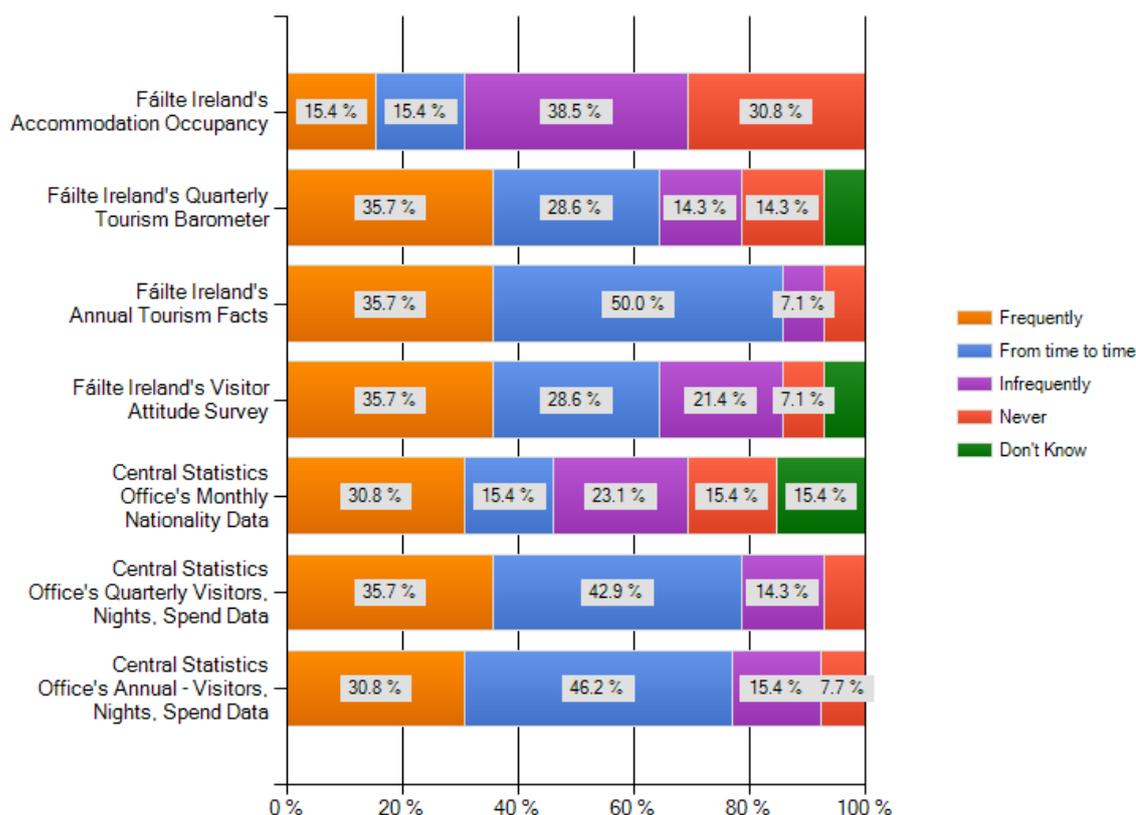
Place	Survey	Awareness
1.	Fáilte Ireland’s Annual Tourism Facts	93%
2.	CSO Annual Data	87%
3.	CSO Quarterly Tourism Data	80%
4.	Fáilte Ireland’s Visitor Attitude Survey	73%
5.	Fáilte Ireland’s Quarterly Barometer Survey	73%
6.	Fáilte Ireland’s Accommodation Occupancy Statistics	60%
7.	CSO Monthly Nationality Data	53%

#### 4.2.4 Usage of Tourism Statistics

Following ‘awareness’ respondents were next asked how much use they made of these surveys and the answers were as follows.

The results indicate that all but accommodation occupancy results were being referenced frequently or from time to time. The CSO Monthly Data was second least popular with all annual statistics outputs being used the most – led by Fáilte Ireland’s Annual Tourism Facts which 86% used either frequently or from time to time.

The survey was anonymous so the lack of interest in accommodation data may reflect an under-representation of that sector.

**Please indicate if you make use of these surveys**


#### 4.2.5 What gaps are there in tourism statistics?

The comments focused on the discontinuation of monthly data and the need for it, coupled with some specific sectoral needs such as in relation to coach touring. Timeliness was stressed as was a need to make the statistics more generally understandable and not just to statisticians. This suggests a need for more interpretation of data by the providers.

9 of the 15 respondents identified perceived shortcomings and gaps in provision which are summarised as follows:

##### Identify Gaps in Provision of Tourism Statistics

1. Monthly Data is preferable to quarterly or annual
2. We need more timely statistics, from CSO & TI
3. Timely breakdown of arrivals into key components i.e. Holiday, Business, VFR  
Timely provision of information on a monthly basis (i.e. back to the pre mid 2010 change to quarterly reports).
4. Need more info on coach touring: spend, numbers, nationality, etc.
5. The primary gap that exists in tourism statistics in my view are as follows:
  1. Accessibility to stats - Other tourist bodies update and circulate industry on a monthly basis - this is not the case in Ireland and trying to access information even through websites is difficult. When you do find them they are uploaded in such a way that is not user friendly.
  2. Overseas market stats and specific market intelligence is generally outdated (by a number of years) - agencies should be ensuring that all stats are as up-to-date as possible.
  3. Agencies responsible for compiling stats appear to have a whole host of useful information when you get to speak to individuals within the specific areas and they are willing to share the information however they don't have a strategy in place to share the information on a regular or timely basis with industry.
  4. Comparable stats for competitor destinations should be compiled and if they are they should be shared with the industry.
  5. Industry needs stats in an understandable simplified version not presented in a manner in which only statisticians can disseminate

6.	How can the gap be filled - would suggest that industry needs to agree a format on the stats should be delivered and the agencies charged with providing and sharing the information make it clear as to what is available and how it can be accessed.
6.	More up to date data without too much of a time lag.
7.	The CSO decision to reduce rather than improve stats service is a major concern. The delay in publishing current information is a problem as it too late to determine trends. The dis-improvement proposed will render the CSO stats of very little value. We need monthly visitor number stats on a monthly basis with info on source market, regional distribution and length of stay. A bonus would be to determine mode of transport.
8.	The industry requires monthly CSO data to inform decision making
9.	Lack of monthly nationality data for top 6 markets is a problem

#### 4.2.6 Any additional comments?

Finally respondents were given the opportunity to make any additional comments on the question of tourism statistics and four took the opportunity to do so.

The focus of the comment from the four respondents was on monthly data provision by CSO and some unwillingness to accept 'excuses'

Their comments are shown in full below:

Any Additional Comments	
1.	Overseas markets: there should constantly be updates and circulated to industry CSO need to go back to providing monthly stats (pipe dream perhaps) - totally unacceptable that they can ride roughshod over an industry that is viewed to be a primary driver of economic recovery simply down to their internal staffing issues - outsource the job if needs be but simply not acceptable to be going back to old Gods time on the provision of much needed and timely information.
2.	More real time data rather than exit surveys
3.	Booking decisions are getting later and later, need for timely figures on visitor, nights and spend data to drive tactical spend particularly in competitive GB market. --- Restore monthly figures.
4.	OLD statistics are of little value. Timeliness of data is very important

### 4.3 Implications

The survey illustrates the amount of usage of this data – with over 90% considering it Very Important or Important. Spontaneous recall of the various data types showed a good level of familiarity with the data sets.

The most used statistics set was Fáilte Ireland's Annual Tourism Facts – a handy reference document covering many areas of tourism performance. The CSO's Annual and Quarterly data were next in 'popularity'.

There were strong views expressed from a minority concerning the cessation of the CSO Monthly Data although the time in receiving any data was considered just as important. An important point made was that statistics need to be accessible and understandable not just to statisticians.

The implications that can be drawn from the survey indicate that there is a high level of usage of most tourism data and that there is generally a good level of satisfaction. The withdrawal of monthly data by CSO was considered by a minority to be a major error while others considered that the timeliness of data was paramount.

There was no reference to the accuracy of statistics and the assumption seems to be that when issued by a state body that they will be accurate. This in a sense is the nub of the issue – whether accuracy should be sacrificed to some or any extent for speed of issue.

## 5. Related Matters

### 5.1 Tourism Satellite Accounts

#### 5.1.1 Background

There has been very little development of TSA tables since the good progress made in 2003/4 when the British Irish Tourism Sector Group led an initiative across Great Britain and Ireland to assess TSA status and the production of its 10 tables. The Group had a particular interest in developing an all-Ireland TSA but separate ones were developed for both the Republic and Northern Ireland.

The development of TSAs remains a strategic project for UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organisation) and it continues to encourage countries around the world in their development. Through 2003-2005 it organised a series of conferences and workshops and at that time many countries began development.

#### 5.1.2 Future Needs

Although UNWTO still regard TSAs as important, there is a sense in some quarters that in the current global economic crisis some of the momentum has been lost. This also appears to be the case within the EU. When discussion began on the updating of the EU Directive, the plan was to include a requirement for all members to work towards a TSA. However, in the ensuing debates and discussions, the specific mention was dropped. Nevertheless it is true that some of the new additions that have been highlighted above will provide, in the long run, a significant benefit to the building of TSAs; in particular the requirement for same-day visits and the breakdown of tourist expenditure.

The position of the Department for Tourism, Culture and Sport in Ireland is that it believes TSA work is important for the analysis it provides on the economic impact of tourism, especially the employment content, where there are various other methods of estimation. However the Department appreciates that the CSO may find it difficult to give it priority at the current time.

The CSO would like to make further progress in this area but recognises the need for good quality tourism statistics (especially same-day visits) to be available (as highlighted in the First Steps project from 2003/4) and is unclear on the level of user demand for further work.

#### 5.1.3 Implications

In a sense a TSA is a luxury that cannot be afforded at the moment – the previous work is not wasted and another step towards the creation of a full TSA will be made through the delivery in due course of day trip data. Ireland should not lose focus on TSA's but hold a watching brief until times are more promising for making progress in developing this account. Both the Department and CSO would welcome industry input into the prioritisation of need for TSA's.

### 5.2 Outsourcing – Third Party Assistance

#### 5.2.1 Overview

Given the position of the CSO, both in terms of statistical rigour and resource availability, it is very unlikely that there will be a return to the release of monthly data by detailed source market in the near future.

Alternative approaches to collecting data have been considered in this review and contracted out surveys that run both in the Republic of Ireland (such as the SOT) and other countries (e.g. the UKTS in the UK) examined.

It remains the case that currently the most efficient way to survey a representative sample of overseas visitors to measure their country of origin is by interviewing at the points of entry/exit into the country. The SOT does interview at those points but Fáilte Ireland is limited in the budget it has available for research and has just reduced the annual sample to 6,000. Furthermore, because of the way it oversamples certain routes, it depends on the CRS to gross up its numbers to give an accurate picture of overseas visitors. It would theoretically be possible to work with Fáilte Ireland to make the sampling representative and increase the sample sizes to provide monthly data. However, we have already seen that it needs an annual sample size of at least 600,000 to generate the required data on a monthly basis. Such an exercise would not only entail a very high level of funding, but would also be duplicating the CSO's own survey.

### 5.2.2 *Alternative Approach*

An alternative approach would be a discussion with CSO and Fáilte Ireland to pool resources and enable the CRS to collect the broader data that the SOT currently provides. Again, however, it is suspected that this would require more funding than could be made available.

Although interviewing at ports is the most efficient way to interview a representative sample, other methods of determining the country of origin of visitors is beginning to become possible. In particular the use of credit cards and mobile phones are opening up new opportunities.

It is possible to gather information on the country of origin of all mobile phones that are switched on in an area, without invading personal privacy. If systems were developed to track tourists, this can potentially provide daily information on their origin.

Equally, if credit card companies could be persuaded to share some of their data, it could give excellent information on tourist expenditure on credit cards registered in each country.

We believe these new methods should be explored, but it is likely to take some time before a suitable system could be established. However reasons for visits cannot easily be identified through this approach.

A more immediate solution to gather some information on overseas visitors lies in the data held by carriers. There is currently a kind of unofficial sharing of this data through Fáilte Ireland, but based only on passenger numbers.

Our discussions with the industry suggest that they do hold detailed information on their passengers, including origin, but unsurprisingly view it as confidential.

Nevertheless in many different industries, including highly competitive areas like soft drinks and other fast-moving consumer goods, operators are willing to share their data with a third party, which pools all the data and then publishes a market total. A good example of this approach in the tourism sector is the data gathered by the Passenger Shipping Association of the UK, where ferry companies provide details of traffic on their routes to an independent research body, which collates it and provides monthly feedback. This data covers cruise numbers as well.

Such an approach does require at least three sizeable operators to participate in order to overcome confidentiality fears, but also needs as many participants as possible to provide complete coverage.

### 5.2.3 *Recommendation*

ITIC may want to consider trying to co-ordinate such an exercise to try to ensure wider availability of carriers' monthly performance figures – within the limits clearly of what stock-market restrictions on data release are applicable.

## 6. Issues

### 6.1 Priorities

The priority decision making that emanates from regular tourism statistics varies business by business. Medium and longer term investment decisions will be based on the broad trends seen over a period of years relating to tourism growth overall; to changes in demand; to changes in markets of origin and in cyclical trends concerning market needs.

Short term decision making is focused largely on marketing matters – which markets are thriving; which are in decline and which need urgent attention to alter an ongoing situation. Because of the nature of the tourism industry and its fragmentation it is usually the agencies charged with marketing and promoting a destination who fine tune their message and focus virtually on a monthly and most certainly quarterly basis. The modern nature of much web based and ‘instant’ marketing increases the need to make changes quickly.

It is this concern which drives the debate on the lack of monthly data that led to this review. The priority for a marketing body is to have data speedily that can help the fine tuning process. However speedy but inaccurate data can do more harm than good. This is particularly so for smaller markets where greater swings in figures may be seen due to issues of sampling error.

Accuracy must take prime position but coupled with a speed of delivery - where possible – that is accurate enough to make sound decisions in the market place. As Tourism Ireland operates on an all-Ireland basis there is a need to ensure that the quality and timeliness of tourism data – on both sides of the border – is harmonised in terms of priorities.

This review has noted that there are various methods of estimating tourism-dependent employment providing a range of figures, which is a concern, and the issue should be addressed by any further work.

### 6.2 Improvements

The suspension of monthly data is largely to do with improving data quality. With the reduced sample sizes on CRS it will not be possible to go back to the level of detail the CSO used to provide on their monthly release, because some of the data would not be sufficiently reliable. However, there is no reason why some data cannot be released monthly.

It is recommended that the CSO could release at least the following data on a monthly basis:

- Total Visitors;
- GB Visitors;
- Rest of Europe Visitors;
- North America Visitors;
- Rest of World Visitors.

This would be a similar level of detail as that provided by the UK for example. Depending on CSO work, it may be possible to widen this to show France and Germany separately as well.

But the user survey and consultations revealed that the issue with CSO data is as much about speed of delivery as about depth of detail.

The CSO used to aim to deliver monthly data seven weeks after the end of the month. If the monthly data is to be actionable, this time frame should be shortened, which may be possible with the reduced level of detail. Although in the

UK monthly data is published six weeks after the month, in Spain, the frontier survey is released after only three weeks (January 2011 data for instance was published on February 22<sup>nd</sup>), and Irish statistics should aim for a similar delivery time.

Even, the above level of detail, however, will not be detailed enough for many of the decisions that need to be taken by ITIC members and the Agencies.

It is recommended that further market detail be provided on a quarterly basis, and the CSO target of ten weeks delivery time for the Tourism and Travel Release (when things are running smoothly) be reduced. It is too long for many users; it means, for example, that Q2 data covering April, May and June, is not available until well into September, by which time most of the season is over. (However, this is no different in the UK where quarterly data usually are released some fifteen weeks after the quarter's end, although this does provide detail on over 50 individual markets). Less detail may mean faster release and serious consideration should be given to prioritising markets for essential data release.

To overcome some of the wait for data being released quarterly, another consideration is to ask for rolling three-monthly data to be published each month. Although the CSO has said this is not currently in their thinking, they are open to discussion about it if there is a clear user need.

### 6.3 Methodologies

The existing methodologies of the four main surveys are all sound and provide very robust data on an annual basis. To improve the frequency of detailed reporting would require a substantial boost to the monthly sample size, which is unlikely to be affordable even in economic good times. They have all been running for a good length of time (the newest, HTS, has over ten years of trends) and inevitably have evolved during their lifetimes. While there is a certain amount of overlap and duplication (e.g. visitor numbers and bednights data from both SOT and CSR/HTS) each survey contributes something unique to the total that no other can in their current format.

There is no "quick fix" to the existing methodologies that could re-instate the supply of the detailed monthly data.

An alternative is currently being explored by Tourism Ireland using the monthly passenger data supplied by DAA and the ferry companies which may provide a temporary solution until the CSO is able to address user needs. Although this information does not provide data on the passengers themselves, it has been available for a number of years and it may be possible to model the back data so that it reflects the monthly data that the CSO used to publish; this model could then be used to "convert" the passenger numbers data to markets, making adjustments for any significant changes in routes, to give a reasonable indication of the latest trends. This work is currently in development.

### 6.4 Organisation, Roles and Responsibilities

The time may now be right for a full and comprehensive strategic review of tourism statistics in Ireland. Such a review has taken place in the UK (2004) and Northern Ireland (2005) and has led to new initiatives and changes in those countries. A review would be able to stand well back from the current situation and fully assess all the user needs as well as the current surveys and their costs to examine the optimal way of collecting and disseminating tourism statistics. It will be particularly relevant as the revised EU Directive is implemented, which will require new data. It could also explore some of the potential new sources of data such as credit card transactions and mobile phone data. It would need the support of all interested parties including ITIC, DTCS, CSO, the agencies and the industry at large as it may have some implications for each organisation's roles and responsibilities.

## 6.5 Follow Up

The Tourism Renewal Implementation Group considered this document as a Draft Report and made a number of very helpful comments and observations. The Group has expressed an interest in maintaining an ongoing brief on the subject of tourism statistics. The following areas have emerged as potential future subjects for review:

- Labour market data;
- Tourism statistics priorities;
- All Ireland data;
- Use of TSA by industry and Government;
- Timeliness.