

By Colm Keipke PA

# Fresh legal challenge to Tara M3 route launched

**E**NVIROMENTALISTS have mounted a fresh legal challenge to force the state to halt work on a multi-million euro motorway through the ancient Hill of Tara.

Summonses were served yesterday on the government, the National Roads Authority (NRA) and tolling contractor Eurolink Ltd by the Campaign to Save Tara group, who are supported in their bid by poet Seamus Heaney, MEP Kathy Sinnott and Sinn Fein.

It comes a week after An Bord Pleanála ruled the M3 could be built over 2000 year-old newly discovered ruins at Lismullen, about 2km from the Tara hill.

A failed legal challenge was previously taken by protester Vincent Salafia of TaraWatch, who dropped a

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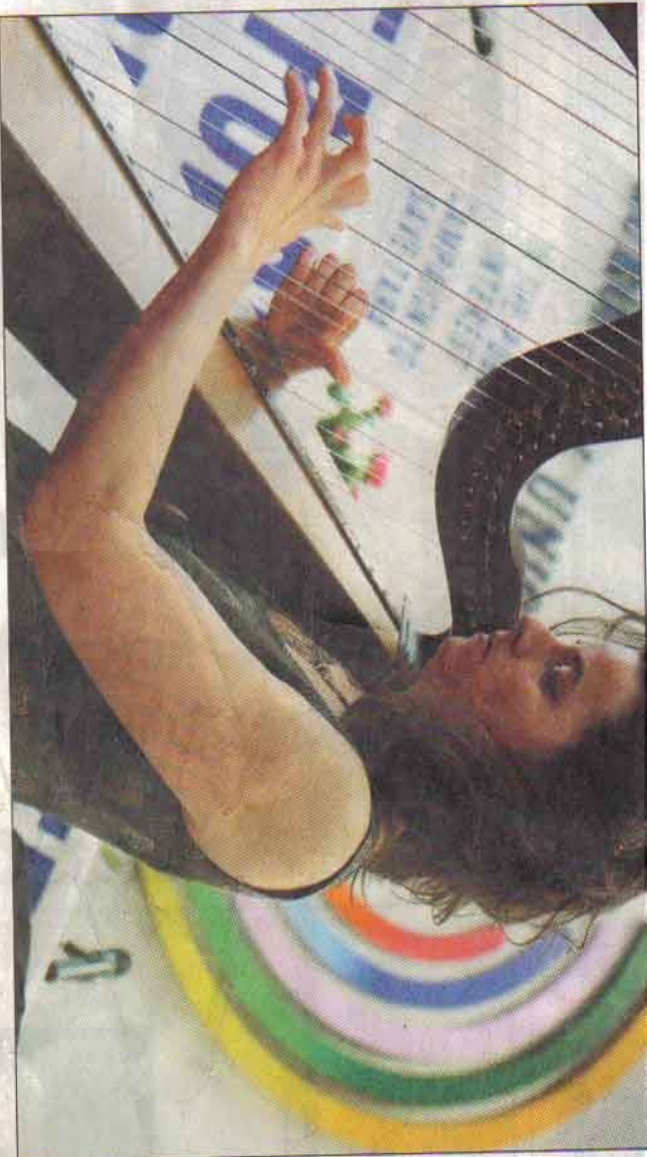
Michael Canney

Supreme Court appeal last October after the state decided not to pursue his legal costs totalling around €600,000.

Campaign to Save Tara's Michael Canney said the courts challenge was taken as a last resort.

"It has never been my ambition to put my name forward in a legal challenge against such a seemingly impenetrable array of political and economic forces," he said.

"I have done so only as a last resort



**■ CAMPAIGN:** Harpist Laoise Kelly plays at a press conference in the European Offices in Dublin yesterday as the Save Tara campaign launched a new strategy to combat the proposed M3 route through the historic Tara Valley

**PICTURE:** Julien Behnel/PA

and only because it is absolutely essential that the silent majority who oppose this road are given a final chance to voice their concerns before the courts."

Protesters want a High Court ruling halting construction on the motorway project pending the outcome of a case before the European Court of Justice regarding the Lismullen national monument.

An Bord Pleanála had been examining whether the discovery last April of the ancient ceremonial structure in the motorway's path would require a fresh planning application by developers.

But it said the find did not constitute a material alteration to the M3 scheme, which it had already approved in September 2003 and gave the project the

green light.

Mr Canney also maintains environment minister John Gormley has failed in his duty to protect Irish national heritage.

"It is in the public interest that the procedural and legal shortcomings of the M3 debacle be further examined in the courts," he said.

"It is in the public interest - not only because of the importance of the Tara landscape in and of itself - but also because this motorway is iconographic of future planning, transport and environmental policy in this country."

At the launch in central Dublin yesterday, campaigner Dr Muireann Ni Bhroichain read out a short statement of support from Derry poet Seamus Heaney.

"It could be said that the Campaign to Save Tara is putting its case in the name of dead generations," he wrote.

"For the past two millennia those generations regarded Tara as a place invested with scared as opposed to secular value.

"Protest against the loss of this value remains imperative."

MEPs Kathy Sinnott and Sinn Fein's Mary Lou McDonald both pledged their support for the legal challenge.

"I believe what is playing out at Tara is a metaphor for modern Ireland and of the choices we have to make," Ms McDonald said.

"The Irish people should not be asked to choose their ancient heritage and a modern developed infrastructure and community."