

The 3rd meeting of the 6th EPA Advisory Committee was held on Friday 6th September 2013, at EPA Headquarters, Johnstown Castle Estate, Wexford.

Members Present: Laura Burke (Chair); Elizabeth Delahunty; Pat Farrell; Colin O'Dowd (via Video Conference); Elaine Nevin; Sharon McGuinness; John Cuddihy; John Sheahan; David Ball.

In attendance: Dara Lynott; Tadhg O'Mahony; Micheál Lehane; Jonathan Derham.

Apology: Martin Hogan; Áine Ryall; Deirdre Lyons.

Secretary: Tom O'Reilly

1. **Introductions**

The Chairperson welcomed the Advisory Committee to Wexford for their 3rd meeting and thanked everyone for travelling.

2. **Minutes of Meeting held on 20 June 2013**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 June 2013 were approved.

3. **Approval of the Agenda**

The adoption of the Agenda was approved.

4. **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

5. **Emerging Issues**

The Chairperson, Laura Burke advised the Committee that since the last meeting, the EPA had been before the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). Feedback from the PAC was very positive and no significant issues were identified. Laura informed the Committee that the C&AG recently signed off the Agency's 2012 Accounts and she further informed the Committee that the Agency's budgets for 2013 are currently on track. Laura advised the Committee that the Agency had not been advised of its Employment Control Framework (ECF) target for 2013 but that the EPA was within the 2012 assigned target of 315 staff.

Laura advised the Committee that progress was being made on the Merger between the EPA and the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII). Consultation had been undertaken with staff of both organisations in all aspects of the Merger. Laura informed the Committee that the Action Plan for the Merger was approved by the Minister for the Environment in July 2013 and would be circulated to the Members. Laura confirmed that the name of the new merged organisation would be the Environmental Protection Agency and that legislation was currently being drafted.

6. **Strategic Environmental Assessment**

(i) ***Overview of Strategic Environmental Assessment – Tadhg O’Mahony, SEA Section, OEA***

Tadhg O’Mahony, SEA Section, OEA, gave a detailed overview of the Strategic Environmental Assessment work undertaken by the SEA Section in the EPA, including detailed information on:

- SEA Overall Objectives
- SEA Effectiveness Review
- SEA Action Plan
- Strategic Integrated Framework Plan for the Shannon Estuary

(ii) ***Discussion***

There was detailed discussion by the Committee regarding sectorial SEAs and the screening process. One Committee Member questioned whether or not the EPA had enforcement powers regarding SEAs. Tadhg explained that the EPA does not have enforcement powers, however the SEA legislation allows for court proceeding to be taken if an SEA is not completed or completed incorrectly. A committee member questioned the benefits of SEAs. Tadhg briefly outlined how Killarney Town Council had completed an SEA which was helping ensure that further development was sustainable and benefitting the town both economically and environmentally. The Committee questioned the ‘Data Gaps’ which existed in SEAs. Laura outlined how the SEA process allows for evidence based decision making, so as a nation we can make decisions with knowledge of their implications.

7. **EPA Research Programme**

(i) ***Overview of the EPA’s Research Programme – Jonathan Derham, Programme Manager, OCLRR***

Jonathan Derham, Programme Manager, OCLRR, gave a detailed overview of the EPA’s Research Programme 2014 – 2020. The presentation included detailed information on:

- STRIVE 2007 – 2013
- 3 Pillars of the EPA Research Programme
- Drivers of the Research Programme 2014 - 2020
- Innovation of STRIVE
- Priority areas of the 3 Pillars

(ii) ***Discussion***

There was detailed discussion by the Committee following the presentation. Various Committee Members offered to assist the Agency’s Research Programme by providing the contact information of representatives within their own organisations who could enhance the work of the EPA’s Research Programme. Other Committee Members offered suggestions for future research which could be undertaken by the Research Programme where commitments permitted. A number of questions were raised by Committee Members concerning the research which will be undertaken on the subject of Hydraulic Fracturing (Fracking) all of which were addressed by Dr Derham. Laura informed the Committee that a copy of the EPA Research Strategy 2014 – 2020 will be circulated to each member in the coming weeks.

8. **EPA Review Update**

Laura Burke gave the Committee Members a brief overview on the progress being made to complete the actions identified in the findings of the EPA Review.

9. **Any Other Business**

(i) ***Minutes of the EPA Advisory Committee***

Laura informed the Committee Members that a recent FOI request had sought copies of all the Minutes of the meetings held by the previous EPA Advisory Committee. The Committee was informed that the Agency had subsequently agreed to the request. Laura asked the Committee, in the interest of openness and transparency, if any Members had an objection to the publication of the Minutes of the EPA Advisory Committee meetings on the EPA's website. The Committee Members agreed that all future Minutes held by the EPA Advisory Committee could be published on the EPA's website.

(ii) ***Next Meeting***

The Chairperson thanked the Members of the Committee for their attendance at the meeting and their contributions to the discussion. The next meeting of the Committee will take place in EPA Headquarters on Thursday 5 December 2013 commencing at 10.30am.

This concluded the business of the meeting.