

Minutes of Ninth Meeting of the EPA – RPII Merger Working Group (MWG)

Location: DECLG, Custom House

Date: 29 November 2013 (14.00 – 16.00)

In attendance:

- Mr. Dave Walsh, Assistant Secretary, Environment Division, DECLG (DW) (Chair)
- Ms. Laura Burke, Director General, EPA (LB)
- Dr. Ann McGarry, Chief Executive, RPII (AMG)
- Ms. Fiona Quinn, Principal Officer, DECLG (FQ)
- Mr. Paul McDonald, Principal Officer, DECLG (PMD)
- Mr. Micheál Ó Cinnéide, EPA (MOC) (item 1 and 2, via video conference)
- Ms. Beatrix Aigner, DECLG (Secretariat)

1. / 2. Introduction and Feedback/Update from Merger Project Group (MPG)

The Chair welcomed participants and invited MOC to update members on the progress of the MPG on the High Level Implementation Plan and the Risks to the Merger.

i. High Level Implementation Plan

MOC drew the attention of the MWG to the updated financial spread sheet on the details of the merger costs and funding. Resources have been received and allocated across various subheads. The MPG will continue to report to the MWG on spending.

A Project Coordinator has been hired and is expected to start on 12 December. The responses to the tender for the HR positions will be evaluated next week. With regard to Finance, a company has been contracted to examine the financial systems of both organisations. Three tenders have also been published for ICT, with regard to the establishment of wireless connections between the EPA (Richview) and RPII (Clonskeagh Square) office buildings, the purchase of licences and the backfilling of resources.

MOC explained that Action 2 under Accommodation has been flagged as “on alert” as it is dependent on decisions on staffing and structures and no specific action has been taken to date. However, the MWG agreed that there was sufficient time to complete this action within the May 2014 deadline.

MOC reiterated the importance of promoting exchanges between the two organisations. In this context, the Corporate Services Annual Meeting will be held in EPA HQ in Wexford next week with staff from RPII attending as well.

LB raised the issue of Accommodation Action 3 on a single reception. She advised that staff should be involved in the decision on how a single reception is to be provided and suggested to start engaging with staff on this issue as soon as possible.

On the Communication actions, the Chair asked when the draft communications strategy would be presented to the MWG. MOC said that the MPG would aim to agree the draft strategy at their next meeting and then send it on to the MWG for approval.

ii. Risks to the Merger

MOC advised that a delay in the enactment of the necessary legislation would pose a serious risk to the achievement of the merger by the end June 2014 deadline. Other potential risks are the tight timeframe in the Project Plan for the implementation of the CORE HR Integrated System, a lack in staff resources required to deliver the merger as well as a delay in addressing employee relations issues.

The Chair asked to add a risk with regard to Communication on “clarity and engagement with external stakeholders and the public”. He then thanked MOC for his update and expressed his appreciation of the work of the MPG. MOC left the meeting at this point.

3. Updates

i. Legislation

PMD informed the Group that the work on the legislation was on schedule. DECLG will continue to consult with both organisations as the Bills proceed. A meeting with the Office of the Parliamentary Council (OPC) will be held in the New Year to develop a timeline for the completion of the drafting and both RPII and EPA will be invited. LB was asked to consider who to involve in the discussions from the EPA side. She suggested raising the issue in the context of the MPG sub-group on legislation. DW advised that the merger legislation was one of the Department’s priorities for 2014.

ii. Communication

AMG asked whether summary minutes of the MWG meetings should continue to be published on the websites of both organisations. The MWG agreed that there was no need to produce summary minutes of the 8th meeting and that the full minutes of that meeting should be published. With regard to the minutes of this (9th) and future meetings, it was agreed that, in general, the full minutes should be published. Where the minutes contain sensitive issues these should be flagged by the MWG and excluded from publication.

4. Directions to MPG

It was agreed to ask the MPG to:

- Circulate the draft Communication Strategy for the next meeting of the MWG;
- Update the Risk Log;
- Publish the minutes of the 8th MWG meeting on the websites of both organisations;
- Review Accommodation actions at the next Project Group meeting;
- Arrange a meeting between all stakeholders with regard to legislation in January.

5. AOB

On the issue of non-ionising radiation (NIR), which has arisen recently in the context of grid upgrades and pylons, DW informed the Group of a recent PQ reply which stated that, while the powers of the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland (RPII) have not yet been extended to include non-ionising radiation within their remit, this matter was under consideration in the context of the proposed merger of the RPII with the Environmental Protection Agency, scheduled for 2014. On further reflection, acknowledging the significant expertise and resource implications of bringing this additional policy area within the remit of the merged organisation and the potential to delay enactment of the legislative provisions necessary to facilitate the merger by July 2014, it is now proposed that this issue will not be considered for inclusion in the merger legislation, but would be considered as part of a general review of the merger (in mid-2015), once the new arrangements have bedded in. It was agreed that a proposed position in respect of NIR would be drafted by the Department for consideration by both RPII and EPA which could then be used to address any future queries.

6. Future meetings of the MWG

Thursday, 19 December 2013, DECLG, 10.30 – 12.30