

Minutes of the Tenth Meeting of the EPA-RPII Merger Working Group (MWG)

Location: DECLG, Custom House

Date: 19 December 2013 (10.30am – 12.00pm)

In attendance:

- Mr David 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 Majella Byrne, EPA (MB) (Item 1 and 2, via video conference)
- Ms Stella Mc Kervey, DECLG (Secretariat)

1. Introduction/ 2. Feedback and Update from Merger Project Group Chair and Project Manager via VC Link

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

MOC started his update with reference to the current status of the legislation and he informed the MWG that a meeting of the Legislation Sub Group had been held subsequent to the MPG meeting. MOC informed the MWG that the Department (Kevin O'Donoghue, Legislation Sub-Group Lead) had stated there are no envisaged delays to the delivering of the required legislation. MOC drew the attention of the MWG to the fact that the legislative process is reliant on the Office of Parliamentary Counsel (OPC) and that the risk of delay in enactment of the legislation necessary for the merger is included in the Risks and Issues Log.

PMD and the Chair stated that the merger has been prioritised by the Department in its strategic planning process and that the Bill was number 3 on the Department's Legislation Programme for 2014 and expected to move to 2nd place before the end of this year. The principles and policies of the draft legislation have to be finalised before drafting of the legislation by the OPC can begin. Also, the Department is engaged with the Bills Office in the Oireachtas and timelines have been discussed. The Department will continue to consult with both organisations as the legislation progresses and agreed to provide a copy of the timeline to assist with this process.

The Chair acknowledged that there is always a risk when it comes to legislation; however, there are no envisaged delays at this time to the merger legislation. The Minister expects this legislation to be enacted and the merger completed for the 1st of July 2014.

MOC indicated that from the New Year onwards that the MPG will meet in a cycle of meetings to coincide with the meetings of the MWG, the EPA Board and the thematic Sub-Groups. It is suggested that the MPG will meet mid-month and that the MWG will meet a week or so later. This was agreed by the MWG.

MOC noted the good engagement from the MPG and that currently there are approximately 25 people directly engaged in the merger process. The Chair acknowledged the work done so far and that the MWG directions were being actioned quickly and thanked all of those involved.

i. High Level Implementation Plan

In relation to update on the Finance Actions, consultants (Capita) have now been engaged to review the financial systems in place and to recommend a suitable finance system for the merged organisation. MOC informed the MWG that the initial deadline would not be met regarding the completion of identifying the most suitable finance system but that work is on target to deliver recommendations mid to late January 2014. The Chair acknowledged that it is useful to flag these issues and the MWG agreed this should not affect the overall merger process.

Regarding HR Action No 6 (Workforce Plan), MOC asked the MWG if the date/ deadline could be extended; it was agreed that this work would commence post-merger and that Q1/2015 would be a more realistic date for completion of the workforce plan.

AMG raised the point that the legislation may have some impact on HR matters and she asked how these issues would be flagged. PMD informed the Group that these issues were already identified and are being examined by the Department and the Legislation Sub-Group. MOC said there is interdependency between the legislation and HR matters and it was agreed that Jim Hurley (EPA) would join the Legislation Sub Group.

ii. Risks to the Merger

MOC informed the MWG that a new risk regarding resources had been added to the Risks and Issues Log and pointed out that it was similar to the third risk already listed. The merger process is reliant on a small number of core staff across the two organisations and the Department and if these core staff are absent for any reason from the process, then this would have a knock-on effect on the merger process. It was agreed that these two risks should be combined and updated to reflect the overall risk to the merger process. It was also agreed that any loss of corporate knowledge could impact on the merger process and should be flagged as a risk. The MPG should update the Risks and Issue Log accordingly.

MB gave a brief summary of the CORE HR Project to the MWG.

MOC then updated the MWG on the High Level Accommodation Actions. As Actions 1 and 2 are more long-term in nature and are dependent on decisions on staffing and structure, no specific action has been taken to date. The EPA and RPII are assessing footfall and activity of each reception in the Dublin offices. Action 3 (single reception) is being prioritised.

At this point of the meeting, MOC and MB left the meeting.

3. Updates

i. Legislation

LB said that there are important legislative issues listed in the working documents of the legislation subgroup which should be discussed at MWG level. She felt that the legislative treatment of certain critical business provisions, such as charging and licensing needs to be addressed and that the MWG needs to be aware of how OPC are planning to deal with these and other issues. Following discussion it was agreed that time would be given to discuss the legislation in-depth at the next MWG meeting and that the issue would feature as a standing item on the MWG agenda for each future meeting.

ii. Draft Communications Strategy

It was agreed that the Department should join the Communications Sub-Group, to ensure that Department focussed messages, relevant to the merger process, are included in communications to the wider audience and that there is consistency in the messages communicated by the EPA, RPII and DECLG.

It was agreed that the draft Communications Strategy is a good starting point and that some further amendments would be provided directly by MWG members to the Communications Sub-Group. It was agreed that the Communications Teams have a very important role to play in engaging proactively with staff in the different areas across the two agencies. This will enable them to gain a full understanding of the roles and functions of the merged organisation, as well as impacts of the merger on particular functions, thereby assisting them in their communications role.

The matter of a single website was also discussed. It was agreed that it is imperative that a single unified website will be ready for the 1st of July 2014. This is an immovable deadline.

Regarding the MOUs, it was also agreed that the completion of this work would not be necessary by the 1st of July 2014.

The EPA Queries Team needs to be brought up to speed in relation to radiological protection matters in order to prepare FAQs and to be able to also direct any detailed queries to the relevant section within the RPIL.

It was also agreed that a revised draft Communications Strategy would be submitted to the EPA Board/RPIL CEO for consideration and approval and that this would then be provided to the MWG for noting.

iii. Review of Accommodation Actions

Update provided by the MPG Chair under Agenda Item 2.

4. Directions to the MPG

It was agreed to ask the MPG to:

- Provide more detailed information on the legislation and the issues arising- through the Legislative Sub Group. This is to be added to the MWG agenda as a standing issue;
- Update the High Level Implementation Plan document;
- Update the Risk and Issues Log document as follows:
 - Combine and update Risks 3 and 5, and
 - Add a risk to cover the loss of corporate knowledge within the two bodies and the Department; and
- Publish the minutes of the 9th MWG meeting on the websites of both organisations.

MWG members will engage directly with the Communications Sub-Group in relation to the revision of the draft Communications Strategy, but the following actions were agreed:

- the Communications Teams should engage proactively with staff within the two agencies;
- a revised draft Communications Strategy should be submitted to the EPA Board for its consideration and approval and that this would then be provided to the MWG for noting; and
- the EPA Queries Team needs to be brought up to speed in relation to radiological protection matters.

5. AOB

AMG requested that a discussion on a general review of the merger be included on the agenda of the next MWG meeting. Although the review will take place post-merger it was felt a discussion around the scope of such a review would be beneficial at this time. It was agreed that this would be added to the agenda of the next MWG meeting.

LB also requested that approval of minutes would be added to the agenda as a standing point so that sign-off of these minutes would be formal in order for the MPG to publish these thereafter. This was also agreed.

6. Future meetings of the MWG

Possible dates for the next meeting of the MWG were discussed. The provisional date for the next meeting is **Monday, 3rd February (time tbc) in the DECLG, Custom House.**