

The 4th meeting of the 7th EPA Advisory Committee was held on Monday, 27 November 2017, in the EPA Regional Inspectorate, Inniscarra, County Cork.

Members Present: Laura Burke & Gerard O’Leary (Joint Chair), Rónán Kennedy, Colette Byrne, Ina Kelly, Harold Kingston, Elaine Nevin, Seán Finlay, Áine Ryall, Seán Finan & Fiona Lyng (via conference call for the ERI/UCC part of the meeting).

In attendance: Matt Crowe, Marie O’Connor and Tadhg O’Mahony (for the ERI/UCC part of the meeting).

Apologies: Cara Augustenborg and Frank Conlon

Secretary: Isobel Walsh

1. **Introductions**

Gerard O’Leary welcomed the Advisory Committee to the Cork Regional Inspectorate for their 4th meeting.

2. **Approval of the Agenda**

The adoption of the Agenda was approved.

3. **Minutes of Meeting held on 4 September 2017**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 4 September 2017 were approved.

4. **Presentation on the Cork Regional Inspectorate**

Marie O’Connor, Regional Manager gave a presentation providing an overview of the Inspectorate’s:

- staffing and structures;
- Offices’ activities;
- strategic review of the regional presence; and
- future opportunities.

Discussion

The Committee discussed the presentation. A Committee member referenced the strong links and engagement with colleges/universities. Another member commended the Office for their advocacy role in promoting citizen science through visiting groups and attending local events. A member commented on the animal health surveillance and the level of reassurance provided to the public by the Dioxin survey.

Laura Burke joined the meeting, and resumed responsibility as Chair.

A Committee member spoke about the work of the Local Authority Water Communities Office (LAWCO)/Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLAs) and the interaction and engagement with the EPA on the circular economy/resource efficiency area.

Action: The topic of EPA/Local Authority work in Environmental Governance was suggested for the next Committee meeting, which would include the work of the NIECE Network (Network for Ireland’s Environmental Compliance and Enforcement) and interaction between the EPA and LAWCO.

5. **Emerging Issues**

The Chairperson provided an update on the EPA's budget, advising that income and expenditure is on track. The Committee were informed that the Annual Report Highlights for 2017 will be issued in January/February 2018. The Chairperson informed the Committee that the budget estimates request was submitted to the Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment for 2018.

The Committee were informed that a small number of additional priority posts were requested through the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and that a decision is awaited from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The Chairperson also provided an update on recruitment competitions.

The Committee were updated on the implementation of the HRM Strategy which is being led out by Gerard O'Leary. The Committee were also updated on the implementation of the Regional Review, which is being led out by Matt Crowe.

Laura appraised the Committee on the recent launches and publications of; the Drinking Water report 2016, the Urban Waste Water report, the EPA Climate lecture, the waste data releases, the Air Quality in Ireland 2016 report and the Radon Day.

Laura also mentioned the upcoming activities such as; the publications of the Greenhouse Gas Inventories report, the launch of the Private Water Supplies report, the National Inspection Plan 2016, the research funding awards and the EPA/HSE Environment and Health Conference on 28th November 2017.

Action: No actions arising.

6. **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

7. **Office of Evidence & Assessment**

(i) Presentation on the Implementation of the EPA Research Strategy 2014-2020

Matt Crowe, Director of the Office of Evidence & Assessment gave a presentation providing an overview on the implementation of the EPA's Research Strategy 2014-2020. The presentation provided details on the:

- co-ordination of research at a national level;
- scale of the programme and key activities;
- benefits of research in generating evidence to support policy, identify pressures and develop solutions;
- three pillars framework – sustainability, water and climate & air;
- priority areas, emerging issues and project management;
- strategic and funding partnerships, and linkages with others; and
- communication and engagement channels.

(ii) Discussion

Matt invited the Committee members for their comments/observations on a set of questions relating to the mid-term review and their role in the communication of the national research programme. The members made a number of comments and suggestions for consideration by the Agency, namely:

- to watch out for potential overlap/duplication of research with other research funding programmes;
- additional value might be achieved through more smaller-scale projects (e.g. €25K) projects which are focussed and may yield quick results;

- Irish Centre for Research in Applied Geoscience (ICRAG) – work being done on public perception and understanding of science may be of interest to the EPA;
- the importance of outreach and communicating results was emphasised, including at the initial stages of a project;
- the strong linkages to EU programmes was welcomed and could be built on;
- could more be done to incorporate behavioural sciences and the social sciences into the research work?
- be mindful of the risk of the research community ‘talking to itself’;
- engaging at community level – link researchers to a town/location – funding to assist the transformation to a low carbon and resource efficient economy and society;
- there are opportunities to work with communities, for example through LAWCO, ‘Pride of Place’, Enterprise Towns – pick a few locations for impact;
- may not be widely known that the EPA has a statutory role in co-ordinating environmental protection research Links with the environmental NGOs could continue to be developed;
- The recent open call for the Sustainable Development Goals was noted as being flexible and appreciated; and
- RTE Brain Storm RIC blogs were given as examples where researchers can communicate their work and its impact.

Laura thanked the Committee and welcomed their suggestions and comments.

Action: Committee Members to be invited to the ministerial launch of the EPA Climate Research reports on climate impacts on 7th December 2017.

8.

Any Other Business

(i) Topics for discussion

The Topic of ‘EPA/ Local Authority work in Environmental Governance’ will be discussed at the next meeting.

(ii) Next Meeting

Following a Doodle poll, the next Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for Friday, 2 February 2018. The meeting will be held in EPA Headquarters, Wexford.

Proposed dates for 2018 are:

Friday, 25th May 2018;

Monday, 3rd September 2018; and

Friday, 7th December 2018

Laura thanked the speakers and Committee members for their contribution, ideas and recommendations.

This concluded the business of the first part of the meeting.

The Advisory Committee travelled to the Environmental Research Institute (ERI), University College Cork for the second part of the meeting

Dr Áine Ryall chaired the ERI part of the meeting. Professor John O’Halloran welcomed the Advisory Committee. Tadhg O’Mahony gave a brief presentation

on the Agency's SEA work and presented, on behalf of the Cork Regional Inspectorate, copies of the 'Tapestry of Light' book to the Committee.

9. **Presentation on the Environmental Research Institute (ERI)**

Professor Sarah Culloty, Director gave a brief presentation providing a summary of the work undertaken by the Institute, placing an emphasis on communications, outreach and collaboration, and contributing to the national dialogue.

10. **UCC EPA Funded Research**

(i) Presentation on 'Enabling the transition to a climate resilient Ireland'

Dr Margaret Desmond, Climate Change Adaptation Research, Environmental Research Institute gave a presentation on enabling the transition to a climate resilient Ireland. The presentation focused on:

- the context for climate change adaptation – looking at current and projected impacts;
- the enabling environment for adaptation/ our preparedness for adaptation based on her research; and
- the Climate Act and the role of the EPA.

(ii) Presentation on 'Microplastics'

Professor Marcel Jansen, Environmental Research Institute gave a presentation on the impacts of microplastics on the Irish environment. The presentation detailed information on the:

- context and overview of the project, and the associated parties involved;
- outreach activities in summarising and disseminating the research findings;
- pressures;
- statistics on common microplastics shapes and polymer types found in lakes and rivers;
- approach; and
- findings and outcomes.

(iii) Presentation on 'Transport-Ireland model to assess options for GHG mitigation'

Professor Brian Ó Gallachóir, Environmental Research Institute gave a presentation on assessing options for GHG mitigation with a particular focus on transport. The presentation detailed information on the:

- sectoral breakdown of GHG Emissions;
- rise in transport emissions;
- mitigation pathways for LGVs – decarbonisation, and HGVs;
- linking targets and policy measures;
- technology pathways to policy roadmaps;
- use of renewable diesel or EVs and emissions impact;
- investigation of intangible costs of EVs; and
- proposed GHG emissions modelling map.

Discussion

There was a discussion by the Committee following the presentations.

Professor Sarah Culloty thanked the Agency for the opportunity to host the presentations. Laura Burke reciprocated Sarah's wordings of thanks to the Environmental Research Institute for hosting and thanked the speakers and Committee Members for their presentations and contributions.

The meeting concluded.