

The 5th meeting of the 8th EPA Advisory Committee was held on Wednesday, 9th March 2022, in the Clayton Hotel Burlington Road, Upper Leeson Street, Dublin, D04 A318.

Members Present: Laura Burke (Chair), Aebhín Cawley, Thomas Cooney, Brendan Dunford, Frances Lucy, Elaine Mahon, Yvonne Mullooly, Elaine Nevin, Sadhbh O'Neill & John Wenger.

In attendance: Gerard O'Leary & Sharon Finegan;
Mary Frances Rochford and Caroline Cronin – Agenda items 6(i) & 6(ii);
Margaret Desmond (via Video Conference) – Agenda item 6(ii).

Apologies: Aoife Foley & Laure Marignol.

Secretary: Mary Donohoe

1. **Approval of the Agenda**

Laura Burke welcomed the Advisory Committee for their 5th meeting which is in person for the first time.

The adoption of the Agenda was approved.

2. **Minutes of Meeting held on 6 December 2021**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 6 December 2021 were approved.

3. **Disclosure of Interests**

There were no disclosures of interests declared.

4. **Emerging Issues**

Laura Burke appraised the Committee of the transition of staff back to EPA buildings. Members were advised that all EPA staff are back in the office at least two days per week since 28 February 2022 and that will increase to three days per week from 28 March 2022. The Committee were informed that a six-month pilot on blended working has commenced which will inform the development of a Blended Working Policy, taking into consideration the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's Blended Working Policy Framework for Civil Service Organisations and the approaches to blended working in other Government organisations.

Laura advised that the EPA has been reaccredited with the KeepWell Mark in recognition of the ongoing staff wellbeing initiatives. The Committee were informed that the 28 staff for posts sanctioned by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in July 2021 are now in place. Work will commence later in the year on a new workforce plan to cover priority areas such as Climate and Energy. The Committee were updated on the 2022 budget allocation from the Exchequer and the ongoing engagement with the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications. The Committee was appraised on the development of the new EPA Strategic Plan 2022-2026 which is now out for public consultation and that the aim is to have the Strategy finalised in April.

The Committee were updated on the invasion of Ukraine and its potential impact on nuclear safety. Laura advised members that the Office of Radiation Protection and Environmental Monitoring (ORM) continue to monitor the evolving situation and are engaging with the relevant national and international organisations. Committee members were informed that radiation monitoring is in place and ORM are preparing for additional monitoring should it be required. There is also ongoing engagement with the European Commission and DG CLIMA regarding the impact of sanctions on the Emissions Trading System and the Union Registry.

The Committee were informed that due to insufficient Waste Processing Capacity issues in the Fingal County Council region in December 2021, the EPA gave a once off derogation to some providers following engagement with Local Authorities and Waste providers. There is ongoing stakeholder engagement in this area.

Laura advised the Committee on the recent launch of the: 'Industrial & Waste Licence Enforcement report 2021'; 'EPA Year in Review'; 'Private Drinking Water Supplies Report 2020'; and the closing of the 'Story of your Stuff' competition. The Committee were informed that the upcoming EPA Water Conference will be a hybrid event from Galway on the 18th & 19th June 2022.

Discussion

A wide ranging discussion was had including: energy as an emerging topic for concern covering data centres and Security of Supply issues; the evolving nature of EPA events including continued hosting of events on-line, greater consideration of the purpose and format for hybrid events, the challenges of virtual break-out rooms, the introduction of case studies of action on the ground and managing expectations for hybrid audiences; current EPA emergency preparedness plans; the role of the EPA as an exemplar for other organisations through increased use of renewable energy sources at EPA buildings and promoting the work of the EPA in advancing sustainability plans for the organisation; the impact of climate change on food security; developing a response to the future skills shortage in environmental areas; public anxiety around the nuclear threat of the war in Ukraine and the importance of a co-ordinated communication on any potential radiation threat; development of a multi-Agency approach to build collaboration on environmental matters; the importance of socio-economic issues and inter-Agency work on sustainability; and the engagement between the EPA and the National Economic & Social Council (NESC) on sustainability.

Action:

The Board Secretary will seek feedback from Advisory Committee members on EPA hosted events to share with the EPA Events Working Group.

The Communications Unit will investigate opportunities for a multi-Agency event involving the Advisory Committee in 2023 to build stakeholder collaboration on specific topics and to showcase actions on the ground.

The Chairperson will issue a formal invitation to NESC on behalf of the Advisory Committee requesting a presentation to the June meeting on '*NESC Activities in the Environmental Area*'.

5.

Matters Arising

Letter to DHLGH re EPA Drinking Water enforcement powers (circulated previously)

Laura thanked Committee members who had sent comments on the draft letter to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage regarding *EPA Drinking Water enforcement powers* and advised that any additional comments must be received by Friday 11 March 2022.

6. **Office of Environmental Sustainability**

(i) ***Presentation on Climate Change Functions***

Mary Frances Rochford, Programme Manager, Office of Environmental Sustainability (OES), gave a presentation on the Climate Change Functions within OES. The presentation provided details on:

- The Evidence function;
- The area of Climate Services;
- Climate Science & International Engagement; and
- The Emissions Trading System;

Discussion/Comments

A discussion was had on: the challenges of compiling and communicating scientific data; ways to improve communication with the public through awareness of their behaviours and views; publishing a user-friendly version of the Greenhouse Gas inventories and projections; the EPA role in land use; regular communication with the public using relevant stories at a national and local level; regular engagement on climate issues through the news media; targeted and focused opportunities for collaboration with Met Eireann; the EPA as a source of behavioural insights for others to use; and the value of readily accessible information.

Action:

The Programme is to consider the recommendations, suggestions and comments of the Committee.

(ii) ***Presentation on Climate Change in the Irish Mind Survey***

Margaret Desmond, Senior Programme Officer, Office of Environmental Sustainability gave a presentation on the Climate Change in the Irish Mind Survey undertaken by the EPA in collaboration with the Yale University Program on Climate Communications. The presentation provided details on:

- The EPA Climate Change and Behavioural Insights Unit;
- Background to Climate Change in the Irish Mind Survey;
- The Survey methodology;
- External engagement;
- Top-line findings;
- Climate change beliefs and attitudes;
- Climate policies; and
- Climate related behaviours.

Discussion/Comments

A discussion was had on: acknowledging the importance of the *Climate Change in the Irish Mind Survey* to provide valuable insights on attitudes and behaviours to climate change; identifying barriers and obstacles to action that are representative across the population; the impact of demographic variables on the findings; the challenges to deliver improved climate change communications; framing of messaging and the appropriate platform selection; harnessing collective action for climate justice; the proof in the survey of the public's awareness of climate issues; hesitancy to change established behaviours; managing the change through policy intervention; the growing need for improved environmental education; rising environmental anxiety among young people; the use of metrics to show the actions

that are making progress; using learnings from the Covid-19 pandemic to promote a call to action for people to ‘do the right thing’; building on cross-sectoral environmental work; identify opportunities to link with policy makers and engage young people; promoting the benefits of co-creation and co-design; and identifying opportunities for upskilling and transition to other jobs in the sustainability area.

Action:

The Programme is to consider the recommendations, suggestions and comments of the Committee and will engage further with the Advisory Committee in this area.

7.

Any Other Business

(i) End of Term report

There will be a short discussion at the next meeting on the approach to the Advisory Committee *End of Term Report* to the Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications.

(ii) Next Meeting

The next Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for Friday 24th June 2022 in EPA Headquarters, Wexford. It is anticipated that one of the remaining 2022 meetings will be held in an EPA Regional Inspectorate.

(iii) Topics for Inclusion

Topics for inclusion for future 2022 meetings are:

- Energy
- The Circular Economy

This concluded the business of the meeting.