

The 6th meeting of the 8th EPA Advisory Committee was held on Friday, 24th June 2022, in the EPA Headquarters, Johnstown Castle Estate, County Wexford.

Members Present: Laura Burke (Chair), Thomas Cooney, Brendan Dunford (via Video Conference), Frances Lucy, Yvonne Mullooly, Elaine Nevin, Sadhbh O’Neill & John Wenger.

In attendance: Gerard O’Leary;
Ian Brunswick (via Video Conference) – Agenda item 6(i).
Dr Larry O’Connell (NESC) and Niamh Garvey (NESC) – Agenda item 6(ii);

Apologies: Aebhín Cawley, Aoife Foley, Elaine Mahon & Laure Marignol.

Secretary: Mary Donohoe

1. **Approval of the Agenda**

Laura Burke welcomed the Advisory Committee to Wexford for their 6th meeting.

The adoption of the Agenda was approved.

2. **Minutes of Meeting held on 9 March 2022**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 March 2022 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 a six-month pilot on blended working commenced with staff working up to a maximum of 2 days at home per week since 25 April 2022. Members were advised that the pilot 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. Laura informed the Committee that a ‘Town Hall’ meeting was held on 25 April 2022 where Directors engaged directly with staff. The next ‘Town Hall’ meeting will be held later this afternoon, 24 June 2022.

The Committee was advised that the new EPA Strategic Plan 2022-2026 was launched at the EPA Water Conference on 18 May 2022 and that the implementation phase has now commenced.

The Committee were provided with an update on staffing numbers and the ongoing recruitment competitions, including the current Programme Manager competition for the Office of Evidence & Assessment. The Committee was informed that the Workforce Plan is being finalised for submission to the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in July, with a focus on a number of priority posts for new or expanded functions.

The Chairperson provided the Committee with an update on the EPA’s budget. The Committee were informed that the purchase of the Castlebar building is being

finalised. Laura advised that Office of Communication and Corporate Services are accelerating the programme to install solar photovoltaic (PV) modules at all EPA locations and that the Agency will progress to the planning application stage later in 2022.

The Committee were updated on the Green Enterprise funding call which seeks applications for project funding to support the transition to a Circular Economy. Members were advised that the funding support for Irish businesses aims to develop circular solutions in product and service design, production and distribution, use of resources including raw materials, and in water, energy and waste reduction.

Laura advised the Committee on the recent launch of the: ‘Green Public Procurement - 2020 Monitoring and Reporting’; ‘Ireland’s Air Pollutant Emissions Summary Report’; ‘Ireland’s Greenhouse Gas Emissions Projections 2021-2040’; ‘Bathing Water Report 2021’; and the ‘Guidelines on the information to be contained in Environmental Impact Assessment Reports’. Laura informed members that the number of website visitors on 26 May 2022 viewing the EPA’s new radon map overloaded the EPA’s servers and brought down the map on the website. Members were informed that a root cause analysis has since been undertaken and a number of actions and possible solutions for the longer term have been identified. The Committee were appraised of the winners of the ‘Story of your Stuff’ competition. The Committee were updated on the successful EPA Water Conference and EPA Climate Conference held recently.

Discussion

A wide ranging discussion was had including: implementing Green Public procurement guidance through improved clarity of evaluation criteria and updated processes; the regulatory role of the EPA in energy security; the positive response to the first hybrid EPA Water Conference; enhancing opportunities to invest in the scientific evaluation of nature based solutions; further engagement and consultation with Local Authorities on nature based solutions that benefit biodiversity without impacting food production; the potential role for the EPA to focus on successful environmental solutions in addition to providing scientific evidence; and consideration of research projects that enhance local knowledge of regional environmental solutions.

Action: No actions arising.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

Agenda item 6(ii) was heard next followed by Agenda item 6(i)

6. Office of Communication & Corporate Services

(ii) Presentation on National Economic & Social Council (NESC) work on Environmental Sustainability

Dr Larry O’Connell (Director of NESC) and Niamh Garvey (Senior Policy Analyst NESC) gave a presentation on the work of the National Economic & Social Council (NESC) on environmental sustainability. The presentation provided details on:

- NESC Background and Role;
- Vision;
- NESC work on environmental sustainability 2012-2021;
- Current work programme and engagement in research and policy spaces; and

- Potential areas for discussion.

Discussion/Comments

A discussion was had on: the role of NESC in conveying economic, social and environmental advice directly to Government; the inter-disciplinary approach of NESC in understanding and adding value to the policy system; driving institutional change - bottom-up and top-down; promoting positive engagement between the EPA and NESC; strengthening engagement and collaboration between both Agencies; use of EPA data, scientific evidence and research to support the work of NESC; the interaction of *policy with research* and *policy with practice*; the evolution of sustainability indicators for Ireland; developing systems to incentivise environmental projects and identifying positive ways to deliver innovative solutions; driving individual and systems change through behavioural science and regulation; developing a 'toolkit' to tackle climate issues including financial incentives, guidance & supports, codes of practice, regulation, enforcement etc; delivering more shared research earlier to policy makers; progressing research on natural capital; improving the methods of stakeholder engagement and overcoming the challenges in stakeholder communication e.g. fake news; and the factors affecting a just transition for Ireland.

Action:

The EPA and NESC are to consider the recommendations, suggestions and comments of the Committee.

(ii) ***Presentation on EPA Advisory Committee Event Development Survey***
Ian Brunswick, Senior Programme Officer, Office of Communication & Corporate Services and Mary Donohoe, Board Secretary, Office of Director General gave a presentation on the findings of the recent EPA Advisory Committee *Event Development Survey* which was issued to all members recently. The presentation provided details on:

- Current EPA events and activities
- EPA Conference Feedback;
- Cross-sectoral, multi-agency event suggestions;
- External engagement; and
- Recommended Direction and next steps.

Discussion/Comments

A discussion was had on the feedback from Advisory Committee members on recent EPA hosted events. The Committee discussed a potential multi-Agency event hosted by the EPA involving the Advisory Committee in 2023. This event could focus on building relationships and demonstrating connectivity between Agencies and promotion of shared work between Agencies. The Committee considered adopting a different forum and format to stimulate alternative thinking and co-creation. The Committee discussed showcasing environmental actions and solutions on the ground with policy makers and broader audiences through the lens of case studies/European Innovative Partnerships (EIPs) etc. or the option to frame an event around the EPA State of the Environment Report in collaboration with the Office of Evidence and Assessment. Members suggested areas for further consideration and discussion including: finalising the main goal for an event that will increase the capacity to deliver for the environment; and identifying event outputs, target audience and venue.

Action:

The Communications Unit, Office of Communication & Corporate Services, is to consider the recommendations, suggestions and comments of the Committee and provide an update to the Advisory Committee at a future meeting.

7. **End of Term Report**

A brief discussion was had on the approach to deliver an Advisory Committee *End of Term Report* to the Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications. Laura advised the Committee that the EPA will provide all the necessary information required to support drafting the Report which would focus on the main issues considered by the Committee during its term of office. The lead authors of the report will need to be agreed at a subsequent meeting and members will give consideration to volunteering for the role of lead author.

8. **Any Other Business**

(i) ***Next Meeting***

The next Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 15th September 2022. A Doodle poll will issue to members seeking alternative dates should this meeting need to be rescheduled. The meeting will be held at one of the EPA regional Inspectorates.

(ii) ***Topics***

A poll will issue to members on the proposed topic(s) for the next Advisory Committee meeting on 15th September 2022.

This concluded the business of the meeting.