

The 4th meeting of the 9th EPA Advisory Committee was held on Wednesday 26th March 2025, in McCumiskey House Richview, Dublin.

Members present: Laura Burke (Chair), Frances Lucy (via Video Conference), Aisling Ryan, Cathal Gallagher, Jerry MacEvilly, Conor Talbot, Ali Sheridan & Niamh Lynam-Lennon.

In attendance: Gerard O’Leary & Eimear Cotter.

Jenny Deakin - Agenda item 6(i)
Tara Higgins & Conor Quinlan – Agenda item 6(ii)

Apologies: Aebhín Cawley, Aleesha Wiegandt, Mark Christal & Geraldine O’Sullivan.

Secretary: Pauline Wilson.

1. **Approval of the Agenda**

Laura Burke welcomed the Advisory Committee for their 4th meeting.

The adoption of the agenda was approved.

2. **Minutes of Meeting held on 15 January 2025**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 January 2025 were approved.

3. **Disclosure of Interests**

There were no disclosures of interests declared.

4. **Emerging Issues**

The Committee were appraised that the budget for 2025 is on track. Laura Burke advised the Committee that an audit of the EPA by the Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG) is now complete.

Laura provided an update to the Committee on staffing numbers which now total 550. The Committee were also updated on the numbers of vacancies, resignations, new starts, job offers and ongoing recruitment competitions. Laura informed the Committee that the Director posts were advertised in December 2024 with interviews expected to be held at the beginning of April with the first post filled in May and the second in September of this year. The committee were informed of the EPA’s continued engagement regarding the Workforce Plan with DECC/DHPLG on a small number of posts in the following areas; Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) Carbon Budget Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), Abstraction Licensing, Critical Entities and Programme Managers.

The Committee were informed that the EPA’s mentoring programme was piloted and successfully implemented in 2024. In total 28 mentoring pairs signed up to the programme. The Chairperson advised the Committee of the importance of the mentoring programme with a significant number of new staff having joined the Agency in the past year along with staff retiring and/or moving to other posts either

internally or to external organizations.

The Committee were informed that the Mid Term Review of the EPA's Strategy is complete and has been published on the EPA's website.

The Chairperson appraised the committee on other areas including: An ICT led initiative to explore the potential benefits of using AI; Legal cases that are currently with the High Court and Court of Appeals. The Committee were also updated that the National Climate Change Risk Assessment which commenced in January 2024 is on track to conclude in the coming months. The Chairperson also updated the Committee on matters relating to anaerobic digestion (AD), Urban Waste Water, Abstractions and End of Waste (EOW).

5. **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

6. **(i) Water Programme - Jenny Deakin**

Jenny Deakin gave a presentation to the Committee providing an overview of the water quality programme:

- EPA's role in water quality;
- Research programme;
- Water quality what we do and Ireland's water monitoring programmes;
- Reporting and frequency of reports;
- Water quality in Ireland;
- Main issues affecting water quality in Ireland - Nitrates and Phosphates;
- Significant pressures on water quality from all sectors;
- Action is needed in all sectors;
- Measures to improve water quality.

Discussion/Comments

There was a wide-ranging discussion on the value of the EPA evidence-based data regarding the status of water quality in Ireland; the continued monitoring of rivers and lakes; measuring the water quality data trends and environmental state; recent positive indicators in some areas regarding water quality. The Committee discussed the early insights report on nitrates which indicates that nitrate levels have reduced but are still too high, particularly in the South and Southeast of the country; also discussed were the ongoing barriers to improvements in water quality; the need for increased and focused investment, more Local authority enforcement action, compliance, and targeted campaigns. Also discussed were the significant pressures across the sectors - Agriculture, Hydro-morphological pressures, Forestry and Urban Waste Water, with action needed by all sectors. The Committee were informed of the development of pollution impact potential maps for Nitrogen and Phosphorous and the use of these maps for engagement with LAWPRO & ASSAP and to inform the farming community in priority catchments on actions to reduce pressures on water quality.

(ii) Climate Change in the Irish Mind - Tara Higgins and Conor Quinlan

Tara Higgins and Conor Quinlan gave a presentation to the committee on Climate Change in the Irish Mind (CCIM) which is a large-scale, nationally representative survey of the Irish population's climate change beliefs, risk perceptions, policy preferences, and behaviours towards action on climate change. 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;
- Climate change beliefs and attitudes;
- Climate Action policies; and
- Climate related behaviours;
- Climate Insight reports.

Discussion/Comments

A discussion was had on: 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; the impact of demographic variables such as urban or rural locations; the importance of communication norms around climate change behaviours in strategic communications; the framing of messaging and the appropriate platform selection; increased concerns around more extreme weather - severe storms, extreme heat, water pollution and shortages and the findings in the survey of the public's awareness of climate issues. The Committee were advised that the Survey has identified that support for policies that affect non-discretionary spending has weakened; the growing need for improved environmental education; and a rising environmental anxiety among young people. The Committee discussed the use of metrics to show the actions that are making progress; 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.

7. Any Other Business

Next Meeting

Date for the next meeting 23 July 2025 in EPA Dublin

Pauline Wilson to link in with the members to agree topics for inclusion at the next meeting.

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

This concluded the business of the meeting.