

AC 096

The 5th meeting of the 9th EPA Advisory Committee was held on Wednesday 23rd July 2025, in McCumiskey House Richview, Dublin.

Members present: Laura Burke (Chair), Frances Lucy, Aisling Ryan (via Video Conference), Aebhín Cawley, Aleesha Wiegandt, Mark Christal, Jerry MacEvilly, Conor Talbot (via Video Conference), Ali Sheridan (via Video Conference) & Geraldine O'Sullivan.

In attendance: Eimear Cotter & Darragh Page.

Maria Martin - Agenda item 7(i)
Warren Phelan – Agenda item 7(ii)

Apologies: Niamh Lynam-Lennon.

Secretary: Pauline Wilson.

1. **Approval of the Agenda**

Laura Burke welcomed the Advisory Committee for their 5th meeting.

The adoption of the agenda was approved.

2. **Minutes of Meeting held on 26 March 2025**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 March 2025 were approved.

3. **Disclosure of Interests**

There were no disclosures of interests declared.

4. **Emerging Issues**

The Committee was informed that, following Cathal Gallagher's resignation due to a change in role and the conclusion of Aebhin Cawley's term of office, the EPA are currently engaging with the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment (DCEE) regarding their replacements on the Advisory Committee.

Laura appraised the Committee that the budget for 2025 is on track. Laura advised the Committee the EPA received a clean audit report from the Comptroller & Auditor (C&AG) for 2024 and that the EPA is engaging with DCEE with regard to the budget for 2026.

Laura informed the Committee that Darragh Page was appointed as Director of OCCS following the retirement of Gerard O'Leary in May of this year. A second Director will be appointed on the Retirement of Micheál Lehane on September 30th. The Committee was informed that a competition for the role of Director General is expected to commence in the coming weeks and that a transition plan has been agreed and is being progressed by the Board to ensure the smooth transition of the new Directors to the Board.

Laura updated the Committee on staffing numbers as at July 2025 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 vacancy rate currently stands at 5.6%. The Committee were informed that the EPA continues to engage with DCEE/DHPLG regarding the requirement for a small number of posts to address new and expanding responsibilities, in the following areas; Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS)/Carbon Budget Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), Abstraction Licensing and Critical Entities and that sanction for these essential posts is awaited.

Frances Lucy and Jerry MacEvilly joined the meeting.

The Committee were informed that DCEE is developing an Environmental Miscellaneous Provisions Bill that will amend the EPA Act to incorporate statutory timelines for licence decision making and allow for limited Licence Reviews and expanded Technical Amendments of licences. The Bill is expected to pass through the Oireachtas and become law by year-end.

The Committee were updated that the EPA has presented at Cabinet Committees on both Water Quality and Climate Action and that the EPA was commended for its scientific input to these critical areas.

The Chairperson appraised the Committee on other areas including; Research and the Research Call 2025; Legal cases that are currently with the High Court and Court of Appeals; and enforcement actions by the EPA against illegal peat harvesting. The Chairperson also updated the Committee on matters relating to waste capacity and the IRRS mission.

The Chairperson updated the committee on recent communications issued by the EPA including Ireland's Greenhouse Gas Emissions 2024; Nitrogen and Phosphorus levels in Irish waters 2024; Large Scale Illegal Peat Extraction Report; and Drinking Water Quality in Public Supplies Report 2024.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. Standing Orders

The Advisory Committee approved the updated Standing Orders, allowing for the use of electronic communications for meetings.

7. (i) Emissions Trading Scheme – Maria Martin

Maria Martin gave a presentation to the Committee providing an overview of the Emissions Trading System in Ireland:

- EPA's role in Emissions Trading and its expansion into new sectors;
- EU ETS CO₂ Emissions 2005-2024 from power generation, oil refining & solid fuel manufacture, Cement and others;
- The Evolution of the ETS rules over the last 20 years and the impacts;
- CBAM Regulation – new EU instrument for preventing carbon leakage;
- ETS2 regulates entities supplying fuel (Buildings, Road Transport and additional sectors)
- Maritime EU ETS – obligations to monitor and report emissions;
- EU ETS Aviation & Carbon Offsetting & Reduction Scheme for International

- Aviation (CORSIA);
- The future of ETS1 & ETS2;

Discussion/Comments

There was a wide-ranging discussion, in particular regarding the importance of the Emissions Trading Scheme in driving reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from the industrial sector. There was also discussion on the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM); its role in tackling carbon leakage where production of goods/products is shifted to a lower or no carbon cost country outside the EU/EEA; the complexities of the CBAM as it transitions from its pilot phase, with free allocation gradually being phased out to give importers time to adjust to the new system; the large administration burden of ETS & CBAM and new legislation which is expected will simplify the system. It was noted that ETS2 covers carbon emissions from Buildings, Road Transport through the regulation of entities supplying fuel. The discussion concluded with acknowledgement that the challenges posed by CBAM, particularly around compliance, administrative burden, and financial implications for businesses remain largely uncertain at this stage and will place a significant burden on EPA resources.

Ali Sheridan left the meeting.

(ii) Circular Economy Review – Warren Phelan

Warren Phelan gave a presentation to the Committee on the Circular Economy Programme and the mid-term review to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme:

- Office and Programme structure, 4 teams within Circular Economy Programme (CEP);
- The Operational Pillars of the Programme;
- Waste Statistics and reporting;
- Waste Authorisations, including Waste Licensing, Closed Landfills and Certificates of Registrations;
- Regulation of By-Products, End of Waste, Hazardous Waste Plan; Food Waste Charter, Green Public Procurement and Reuse and Repair;
- Priorities;
- Panel appointed for the Mid-term evaluation of the Circular Economy Programme 2021 – 2027 and the objectives;
- Consultation and engagement with external and internal stakeholders;

Discussion/Comments

A wide-ranging discussion took place, covering several key developments and challenges in the waste and by-product sector. The Committee noted the publication of the national criteria for determining whether Soil and Stone qualifies as a by-product, which offers clearer guidance for stakeholders assessing material status. There was a discussion on the complexities posed by invasive species, particularly in the context of road planning; compliance and the end user's responsibility to ensure that sourced by-product material is fit for purpose; and the national end of waste decision for recycled aggregates which was published in September 2023. The Committee discussed waste generation in Ireland which is steadily increasing, concerns around recycling targets not being met, a decline in packaging recycling rates, and the continued reliance on exporting both municipal and hazardous waste.

The Committee discussed the EPA's priority areas and awareness actions rolled out by the EPA aimed at tackling rising waste generation and what can be done by Industry, Local Government and individuals.

8. **Any Other Business**

Next Meeting

Date for the next meeting 15 December 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.