

The 6th meeting of the 9th EPA Advisory Committee was held on Monday 15th December 2025, in McCumiskey House Richview, Dublin.

Members present: Laura Burke (Chair), Frances Lucy, Geraldine O’Sullivan, Jerry MacEvilly (via Video Conference) & Conor Talbot (via Video Conference).

In attendance: Aisling Ryan (via Video Conference) – Agenda item 6(i)
Eimear Cotter, Tom Ryan & Pat Byrne.

Tom Ryan - Agenda item 6(i)
Pat Byrne – Agenda item 6(ii)

Apologies: Ali Sheridan, Aleesha Wiegandt, Niamh Lynam-Lennon, & Mark Christal.

Secretary: Pauline Wilson.

1. **Approval of the Agenda**

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

The adoption of the agenda was approved.

2. **Minutes of Meeting held on 23 July 2025**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 July 2025 were approved.

3. **Disclosure of Interests**

There were no disclosures of interests declared.

4. **Emerging Issues**

The Chairperson provided the Committee with an update on the EPA’s budget for 2025 and noted that income and expenditure are in line with expectations. The EPA is continuing to engage with DCEE and the DHLGH on funding allocation for 2026.

Laura advised the Committee that a competition for the role of Director General has commenced. Laura also updated the two new Directors have joined the Board in the past 6 months. The Committee were informed that a transition plan has been agreed by the Board which is being implemented to ensure the smooth onboarding of new Board members.

Laura appraised the Committee that a significant volume of recruitment campaigns were carried out during 2025 and that the vacancy rate currently stands at 4.7%. The Committee were updated that staffing numbers in the EPA now total 550 and that over 50% of staff are new to their role in the Agency. The Committee were also updated on the numbers of vacancies, resignations, new starts, job offers and ongoing recruitment competitions. Laura updated the Committee that there is ongoing engagement with DCEE/ DHPLG regarding the Workforce Plan on a small number of posts in the following areas; Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) Carbon Budget Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), Abstraction Licensing, Critical Entities

and Senior Managers in the EPA. The Chair also informed the Committee that the EPA's Blended Working Policy has been revised to incorporate changes since it was originally approved including the requirements outlined in the Workplace Relations Commission's 'Code of Practice' and is expected to be finalised by the end of the year.

The Committee were updated on the progress of the Environmental Miscellaneous Provisions Bill that will amend the EPA Act. The Bill is currently passing through the Oireachtas and expected to become law in the near future. The Committee were further updated on changes that will be provided for in the Bill including timelines for decision making, Limited Licence Reviews and expanded use Technical Amendments.

The Chairperson appraised the Committee on other areas including: the Accelerated Infrastructure Action Plan, which aims to fast-track the delivery of critical infrastructure in Ireland; the number of Judicial Reviews related to EPA decisions, which have increased significantly in recent years; and the progress for the IRRS mission which will take place in January 2026. The Chair also updated the Committee on the success of the recent Environmental Law Conference hosted by the Irish Centre for European Law and the EPA.

The Chairperson updated the committee on recent communications issued by the EPA including: 'Local Authority Environmental Enforcement Performance Report 2024', 'Water Quality in Ireland 2019- 2024 Report', 'Urban Wastewater Treatment in 2024 Report', 'Air Quality in Ireland Report 2024' and 'Early Insights Nitrogen Concentration Indicator Jan-June 2025 Overview Report.'

5. **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

Aisling Ryan joined the meeting

6. **(i) Some recent environmental enforcement challenges – Dr Tom Ryan**

Dr Tom Ryan gave a presentation to the Committee providing an overview of recent environmental enforcement challenges in Ireland, including:

- Fishkill on the Blackwater and the role of the Agency
 - The emergency response and multi-agency investigation
 - EPA's investigation of EPA-regulated sites
 - Joint Oireachtas committee meeting 30th Sept attended by EPA, Inland Fisheries Ireland, Marine Institute and Cork County Council.
 - Independent review and report to the Minister
- Large Scale illegal Peat Extraction
 - EPA roles and responsibilities and the regulatory regime
 - Illegal peat extraction causing catastrophic damage to local ecosystems and habitats
 - 30-40 operations investigated per year
 - 300,000 tonnes of peat exported in 2024
 - Local Authority Enforcement action required
 - Bord na Móna carrying out remediation programmes to rehabilitate previously legally harvested peatlands
 - Joint Oireachtas Committee meeting on illegal peat extraction

attended by EPA

Discussion/Comments

A discussion was had on: recognizing the vital role of the public in raising awareness of pollution and its potential risks to human health and the environment; the EPA's continued monitoring and enforcement of Regulated facilities, pursuing prosecutions through the District Court and in more serious cases through the Director of Public Prosecutions; EPA powers to revoke or suspend a licence as a result of serious breaches; the importance of the National Priority Site list in deterring non-compliance in the regulated community; reinforcing accountability by communicating instances of non-compliances, including penalties and fines for the polluter; the lack of enforcement of the regulatory regime by Local Authorities in the area of illegal peat harvesting; large scale illegal peat harvesting operating outside the planning laws; the deployment of the Environmental Liabilities Directive to compensate for damage to the environment; Financial Provision to be continually kept under review; and the importance of bog rehabilitation in protecting and restoring the natural environment.

(ii) Citizen Science Activities – Pat Byrne

Pat Byrne gave a presentation providing an overview of the Agency's engagement with Citizen Scientists on the collection of environmental data. The presentation provided details on:

- What is Citizen Science?;
- Citizen Science in the EPA?;
- objectives of Citizen Science in the EPA;
- Key Citizen Science Projects undertaken including the EPA run 'Borrowing a Digital Radon Monitor from your local Library', 'Clean Air Together' and the 'GLOBE Programme'
- the future direction of Citizen Science.
- 'Curious noses – Belgium' - linking in with other Agencies
- Awareness and behaviour change surveys
- Public participation
- What's next?

Discussion/Comments

A discussion was had on: enhancing community and public engagement in the Citizen Science programme; raising awareness of Citizen Science; developing opportunities to move Citizen Scientists from awareness into actions that contribute to environmental solutions; widening existing partnerships and exploring other partnerships to broaden the Citizen Science programme; identifying and implementing new activities for the programme, linking in with European Agencies; identifying strategic and research opportunities; investigating viable links or trends between Citizen Science and Climate Change; making the programme more accessible to different demographic groups; removing resourcing as a barrier to expanding the programme; clarifying how the EPA can add value; and consideration of public suggestions on local environmental topics.

7. Any Other Business

Next Meeting

Date for the next meeting 12 March 2026 location to be confirmed

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

meeting.

Potential topics:

- Infrastructure and changes to licensing requirements for EPA
- Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)

Frances Lucy and the Committee members expressed their appreciation for Laura's professionalism and dedication to the EPA over the last 20 years and extended their best wishes to her on her upcoming retirement.

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

This concluded the business of the meeting.