

The 6th meeting of the 7th EPA Advisory Committee was held on Thursday, 24th May 2018, the EPA Regional Inspectorate, McCumiskey House, Richview, Clonskeagh Square, Dublin 14.

Members Present: Laura Burke (Chair), Rónán Kennedy, Elaine Nevin, Áine Ryall, Harold Kingston and Seán Finlay.

In attendance: Gerard O’Leary, Micheál Lehane, Tom Ryan and Ciara McMahon.

Apologies: Colette Byrne, Fiona Lyng, Ina Kelly, Seán Finan and Cara Augustenborg.

Secretary: Mary Donohoe

1. **Introductions**

Laura Burke welcomed the Advisory Committee to Dublin for their 6th meeting. Laura advised the Committee of the retirement of Committee Member, Frank Conlon and that a request has been made to the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment to appoint his replacement to the Committee. Laura introduced the Committee to the recently appointed Board Secretary, Mary Donohoe.

2. **Approval of the Agenda**

The adoption of the Agenda was approved.

3. **Minutes of Meeting held on 2 February 2018**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 2 February 2018 were approved.

4. **Emerging Issues**

The Chairperson advised the Committee that all items in the management letter following the C&AG Audit for 2016 have now been addressed and that the audit for the 2017 Accounts is ongoing. Laura Burke advised that the EPA budget allocation for 2018 is nearing completion but confirmation of the National Waste Prevention Programme budget from the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment is still outstanding.

Laura advised the Committee that the Agency currently has 411 posts and provided an update on the recruitment competitions in Q1 2018. The Committee were advised of the recent lateral mobility of 24 staff throughout the Agency. Laura also updated the committee on the pilot EPA Internship Programme which commenced in Q1, fostering collaboration with Third Level Institutions nationally.

The Committee was advised that the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment has reappointed Laura Burke as EPA Director General and that Gerard O’Leary will move laterally as Director of the Office of Communications and Corporate Services.

Laura advised the Committee on the progress being made on GDPR implementation, including the appointment of Byrne Wallace & Co to provide expert advice on training, updating policies and contracts, and records management.

The Committee were informed that a Gap analysis is now complete and a Data Protection Officer has been appointed.

Laura informed the Committee that the new Oversight Agreement & Performance Delivery Agreement with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government will shortly be finalised and once agreed, will last for three years.

Laura appraised the Committee on the recent launches of: the National Waste statistics web resource, Emissions of Air Pollutants, National Priority Sites, the EPA Research Call, ETS Emissions 2018 and the Bathing Water report.

Laura also mentioned the upcoming activities such as: the Greenhouse Gas Projections Seminar, publications of the Drinking Water report, the Water Quality report and the Industrial and Waste Licence Enforcement report. The Committee were informed of the forthcoming Environment Ireland Conference on 4th October 2018 and that the Advisory Committee is to be included on the circulation list for all Press Releases, conferences etc.

The Committee were appraised of the European Heads of Agencies Network meeting held in Dublin in April. Participating students from the 'Story of your stuff' secondary school's competition met the group and Laura confirmed the competition is running again in 2018.

Discussion

A Committee member raised a concern on delays in the issue of licences for inert soil and stone and other materials related to construction related activities and suggested a review of resources in the licencing team. Laura advised that the Office of Environmental Sustainability prioritises licence assessments and has issued a number of licences for inert soil and stone facilities. With regard to by-product classification, the Agency issued guidance on classification of soil and stone as a by-product to clarify the process and highlighted issues with regard to current practices. Another member queried if there had been engagement with the Hauliers Association and Laura confirmed that the Agency is willing to engage with all stakeholders. A discussion was had on the importance of segregation of soil and stone at source which would increase re-use and reduce reliance on limited landfill capacity and also the potential for increased research in this areas through the Green Enterprise call.

A member queried if lateral mobility for staff is voluntary. Laura informed the Committee on the lateral mobility process and the Lateral mobility policy.

The Committee was updated on an OECD review of the Agency with completion of the OECD questionnaire ongoing. As a stakeholder of the Agency, the Advisory Committee should form part of the OECD review.

Action: The Agency will ensure that the Advisory Committee are included in stakeholder engagement by the OECD in their review of the EPA.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. **Mid-term review of the Committee's contribution**

Gerard O'Leary, Deputy Director General, gave a presentation on the Committee's contribution to the Agency based on a summary of their recommendations from January 2017 to January 2018.

The presentation discussed the Committee's engagement with the Agency and highlighted their recommendations recorded at each meeting, the subsequent actions undertaken by the Agency and provided an update on each recommendation. The presentation summarised the main topics discussed at meetings in:

- Kilkenny;
- Castlebar;
- Dublin;
- Cork; and
- Wexford.

Discussion

The Committee commended the quality of the summary report on the Committee's contribution to the Agency. Gerard O'Leary thanked the Committee for their input and recommendations and advised that they have influenced the thinking of the Agency. Gerard suggested that the mid-term summary will assist the Committee in compiling their end of term report. A Committee member suggested that a future meeting could address the environmental implications of Project 2040 as it relates to Climate and waste. Another member proposed the topic of Sustainability in the Construction sector as it relates to enforcement of Construction and Demolition waste. Another member stated that a future meeting should address what other EPA Advisory Committees are doing. A Committee member raised the issue of Air Quality and concerns for public health. Another member proposed Water quality issues nationally as a possible topic for the Advisory Committee to address. A Committee member raised the issue of public engagement and behavioural change, and the links to sustainable development goals.

Action: The Chair is to review the proposed topics from the Committee with the Board Secretary and will schedule topics to be addressed in future meetings.

7. **Citizen Science - Public engagement**

Ciara McMahon, Programme Manager 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 the:

- What is Citizen Science?;
- How has Citizen Science evolved?;
- What is the value of Citizen Science?;
- What is Citizen Science in the EPA?;
- Strategic framework for Citizen Science in the EPA;
- Objectives of Citizen Science in the EPA;
- Sample of Citizen Science Projects undertaken; and
- New EPA-supported Citizen Science Projects.

Discussion

A member queried if data gathered from Citizen Science experiments could be used in prosecutions. Ciara McMahon informed the Committee that currently Citizen Science data is used for indicative modelling to supplement existing monitors, e.g. air quality. Ciara advised the Committee that the primary purpose of Citizen Science is to engage the public in science, however the public have been involved

in prosecutions previously, such as cases of noise pollution. A member stated that they would circulate an article from the Harvard Environmental Law Program related to Citizen Science prosecutions. A member suggested that the profile of Citizen Scientists participating is dependent on the demographic and socio-economic background and that there should be a targeted programme to raise awareness and engage other members of the public. The Committee was informed of An Taisce and EPA engagement with a range of schools through the GLOBE programme.

Action: The Citizen Science programme will consider the recommendation to engage with a wider audience and will explore the use of Men's Sheds and the National Dialogue on Climate Action as potential resources.

8. **EPA Strategy mid-term review**

Tom Ryan, Programme Manager, gave a presentation providing an overview of the Agency's mid-term Strategy review. The presentation provided details on the:

- Overview of Process;
- Road Map of the Review;
- Update on the Regional Review & New Human Resource & Development Strategy;
- Emerging changes influencing the Strategy; and
- Outcomes from the review.

Discussion

A Committee member queried the feasibility of applying a nine-month timeline to the issue of licences. Tom Ryan advised that while the challenge may appear ambitious, the Licensing team continually seeks to improve efficiencies in the licensing process. A member queried the new actions to be incorporated in the Strategy to address the Circular Economy. Tom Ryan advised that there will be no new specific action but that the National Waste Prevention Programme will be reviewed in the context of the Circular Economy and the findings incorporated into the Strategy. Another member raised the challenges around food waste and short use by dates, with the cost of food waste being passed back to the producer. A member queried the inclusion of mental health strategies in the review. The Committee were advised that the Agency offers a suite of supports to staff and hosts a range of talks annually to provide practical advice on Mental Health. A Committee member suggested more options for staff to volunteer in the community in areas related to their work. The Advisory Committee were advised that this is done in a number of ways including through Junior Achievement Ireland.

Action: The outcomes of the EPA Strategy mid-term review will be circulated to the Advisory Committee.

9. **Any Other Business**

(i) Topics for discussion

It was agreed that the Board Secretary will advise the Committee on the topics to be discussed at the next meeting.

(ii) Next Meeting

The next Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for Monday, 3 September 2018. The meeting will be held in the EPA Headquarters, Johnstown Castle Estate, County Wexford.

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

The meeting concluded.