

The 7th meeting of the 7th EPA Advisory Committee was held on Monday, 3rd September 2018, in the EPA Headquarters, Johnstown Castle Estate, County Wexford.

Members Present: Colette Byrne, Ina Kelly, Seán Finan, Cara Augustenborg, Rónán Kennedy, Elaine Nevin, Harold Kingston and Seán Finlay.

In attendance: Gerard O’Leary (Chair), Matt Crowe, Andy Fanning and Jonathan Derham.

Apologies: Laura Burke, Áine Ryall and Fiona Lyng

Secretary: Mary Donohoe

1. **Introductions**

Gerard O’Leary welcomed the Advisory Committee to EPA Headquarters, Wexford for their 7th meeting. Gerard offered apologies from Laura Burke who is speaking at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Lead Authors meeting in Dublin this morning.

2. **Approval of the Agenda**

The adoption of the Agenda was approved.

3. **Minutes of Meeting held on 24 May 2018**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 May 2018 were approved.

4. **Emerging Issues**

Gerard O’Leary provided the Committee with an update on the EPA’s budget. The Committee were informed that no material items have been raised by the C&AG Audit for 2017, as of the 6th July 2018. The Chairperson informed the Committee that the estimates have been submitted to the Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment for 2019.

The Agency currently has 411 posts, with 16 recruitment competitions commenced since January 2018. 25 Students participated in the EPA’s 23rd Summer Student Placement Programme, with placements that ran from 5th June to the 24th August 2018. The Chairperson also advised of Tom Ryan’s appointment as Director of the Office of Environmental Enforcement and Gerard O’Leary’s move as Director of the Office of Communications and Corporate Services.

Gerard informed the Committee that the EPA Employee Engagement Survey will issue to staff in late September, as part of the HRD Strategy. The Committee was advised that the Workforce plan is being finalised with a focus on a small number of priority posts to address Licence and Enforcement requirements. The Chairperson confirmed that the EPA Mid Term Strategy Review process is now complete with minor changes to the original strategy following an extensive process of stakeholder consultation and collaboration.

The Committee were informed 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 were signed during July. Gerard advised the Committee that a number of Corporate Governance Policies and Procedures have been reviewed in line with General Data

Protection Regulation (GDPR), which came into effect on 25th May. Fire Safety Audits have been now carried out at all EPA offices.

Gerard updated the Committee on the recent RTE Special Waste Investigation Programme in June and advised that post Prime-Time, the EPA are engaging with the Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment on Waste and future roles for the agency in the area of Waste Management.

Gerard appraised the Committee on the recent launches of; the Industrial and Waste Licence Enforcement Report 2017; EPA new water indicators' report for Ireland; and Towards a Resource Efficient Ireland: Annual Report for 2017.

The committee was informed that the Chair of the IPCC attended a Climate event on the 30th August run by the Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment, at which Laura Burke was a panellist. The Chairperson also advised that Laura will attend a Joint Oireachtas Committee hearing with the Climate Council in mid-September.

Gerard mentioned the upcoming activities such as; the Environment Ireland Conference on 4th October, at which Karmenu Vella, European Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, will address the conference via video link; and the Agency is to present at the Transport Infrastructure Ireland conference in the areas of waste and waste management.

Discussion

A member queried the possibility of receiving updates of EPA publications. Gerard advised the Committee that, as agreed at the Advisory Committee meeting on 24 May, all future EPA Press releases will issue to Committee members once any GDPR matters have been addressed by the Communications team. Jonathan Derham informed members of the web link to EPA research publications and that members of the Committee could be added to the circulation list.

A member queried the impact of GDPR on complaints to licencing applications. The Committee was advised that EPA advice on submissions has been updated to reflect GDPR legislation, in consultation with GDPR advisors ByrneWallace. The Data Protection Officer will work to ensure a transparent process for each side in the application process.

Action: Following on from the recent Mid Term Strategy Review process, the Board Secretary will circulate a copy of the Strategic Plan 2016-2020 to the Committee. An invitation will issue to all Committee members for the Environment Ireland Conference.

Members of the Advisory Committee to be included in the Office of Evidence & Assessment:

- circulation list for the EPA Research Newsletter & New published research bulletins;
- the IPCC Climate Lecture Series invitation list; and
- the EPA-HSE Health & Environment Conference list.

5. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6. National Dialogue on Climate Action

Jonathan Derham, Programme Manager, Office of Evidence and Assessment, gave a presentation on the National Dialogue on Climate Action (NDCA). The presentation provided details on the:

- EPA climate Science Activities
- Paris Climate Accord, 2015

- National Policy
- Core Ambitions for the NCDA
- The Climate Dialogue Advisory Group
- Leveraging Existing Activities
- Secretariat to the NDCA
- Update on Regional & Local Gatherings
- Next Steps

Discussion

The Committee discussed the presentation. A Committee member queried if the format adopted for the National Dialogue on Climate Action is comparable with that used for the Citizens Assembly. Jonathan Derham clarified that each dialogue gathering will involve volunteers who address specific regional challenges with topics likely to vary depending on location. The Citizens Assembly involves nominated representatives from across society and centres on precise questions with a formal voting process. Another member queried the method of capturing ideas to disseminate to a wider audience and the challenge of long term implementation and funding for agreed actions. Jonathan advised the Committee that regional officers will be appointed to engage with relevant local stakeholders on the unique challenges for each area. The Dialogue intends to create its own website to facilitate the wider circulation of information and to promote networking among a range of interest groups. Jonathan informed the Committee that the roadmap for implementation requires funding, resources and political commitment to ensure follow through on agreed objectives.

A member recommended that extensive national media coverage is essential for the promotion of the NCDA and for the generation of ideas at local level. Another member commended the Dialogue process as an opportunity for members of the public to influence decision making at Government level. A member queried the data gathered on both participants and on the topics of discussion. Jonathan informed the Committee that topics were based on the regional focus and broad data was gathered on participants in line with GDPR. Matt Crowe informed the Committee that some items will be both national and regional in focus and the facilitation process has proved an excellent means of stimulating discussion. He added that the Dialogue process will be guided by the Citizens Assembly on how to deal with the resolution of larger issues around climate and adaptation.

A member proposed the commencement of a 'Climate week' initiative in place of the existing 'Climate Action Day', coupled with political branding to convey a sense of authority to the event. Another member commented that for the event to be meaningful, it would require the commitment of significant resources, Government support and a high-profile *champion* to ensure community engagement on a small number of targeted objectives. A Committee member proposed the promotion of a different theme for each day of the 'Climate Week' to raise awareness of local and national items and as a means of increasing media coverage. Members of the Committee commended Jonathan Derham and the EPA for the success of the inaugural National Dialogue on Climate Action held in June and requested an update at the next meeting on the next NDCA meeting in November.

Action:

The Board Secretary will circulate the current staff list for the Climate Services team.

7. **Water Quality**

Andy Fanning, Programme Manager, Office of Evidence and Assessment, gave a presentation on Water Quality and the Water Framework Directive. The presentation provided details on the:

- Actions and Outcomes under the EPA Strategy
- Cycles of River Basin Management Planning
- New River Basin Management Plan for Ireland
- Key outcomes from the Plan & the role of the EPA
- Status of Ireland's Waters
- Water Quality Reporting

Discussion

A Committee member suggested that significant resources and expertise will be required for implementation of the new River Basin Management Plan. Andy Fanning advised the Committee that stakeholder engagement will be critical to the implementation process and the requirement to address different priorities for each catchment area.

A member raised the impact of Climate Change and future droughts on Water quality, including the role of Irish Water. Andy informed the Committee that the catchments team collaborate extensively on both water quality and flood mitigation with the aim to deliver resilient water services. Matt Crowe informed the Committee that the River Basin Management Plan will clarify the roles and responsibilities for those accountable for water quality, including Irish Water.

A member queried the task of tackling the large volume of water bodies in the Plan. Andy advised the Committee that a strong national focus is required to ensure compliance with the National Framework Directive and increased collaboration is needed in specific areas to achieve the required outcomes. It was agreed that it is essential to capture and apply the learnings on governance, scientific evidence and implementation.

A Committee member raised the issue of how to address matters identified which fall outside the Plan. Andy informed the Committee that the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government is investigating expanding the schemes over time and the EPA is working closely with the Nitrates Division of the Department to this end. A member drew attention to the impact of 'co-benefits' from environmental initiatives and the potential for 'co-damage', identifying the need to avoid unintended consequences on water quality. Another member addressed potential links between water contamination and human health. Matt Crowe advised that the issue of human health is addressed by the WFD and that public health outcomes should improve with implementation of the Directive. Andy informed the Committee of the ongoing engagement with farming representatives on water protection.

Action: The Board Secretary will circulate a copy of today's presentations to Committee members.

8. **Any Other Business**

(i) Geological Survey Ireland

A member acknowledged the excellent collaboration between the EPA and Geological Survey Ireland. The Director Geological Survey Ireland will write to Laura Burke to progress the collaborative work between the two State Agencies.

(ii) Advisory Committee membership

The Committee was advised that a decision is awaited from the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment on a replacement for retired Advisory member, Mr Frank Conlon.

(iii) Topics for future meetings

Suggested topics for future meetings include:

- GMO technologies
- Draft: Advisory Committee end of term report
- The EPA role in Sustainable Development Goals for Ireland

(iv) Next Meeting

The next Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for Friday, 14 December 2018. The meeting will be held in the EPA Regional Inspectorate, McCumiskey House, Richview, Clonskeagh Road, Dublin 14.

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

The meeting concluded.