

The 8th meeting of the 7th EPA Advisory Committee was held on Friday, 14th December 2018, in the EPA Regional Inspectorate, McCumiskey House, Richview, Clonskeagh Square, Dublin 14.

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

In attendance: Gerard O’Leary, Eimear Cotter, Bernadette Murray and Mary Frances Rochford.

Apologies: Colette Byrne & Ina Kelly

Secretary: Mary Donohoe

1. **Introductions**

Laura Burke welcomed the Advisory Committee to Dublin for their 8th meeting.

2. **Approval of the Agenda**

The adoption of the Agenda was approved.

3. **Minutes of Meeting held on 3 September 2018**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 3 September 2018 were approved.

4. **Emerging Issues**

Laura Burke informed the Committee that Fiona Lyng stepped down from the Advisory Committee and Laura has engaged with the Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment on the possibility of appointing her replacement.

Laura advised the Committee that the Mid-term Strategy review process is now complete and the updated strategy is accessible on the EPA website.

Laura provided the Committee with an update on the EPA’s budget 2018 and informed the Committee that the estimates have been submitted to the Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment (DCCAE) for 2019. The Committee were informed that there is ongoing engagement with DCCAE on the Environment Fund and the outcomes from this engagement will be advised to the Advisory Committee. Laura also noted the focus by the Department on the possible implications of Brexit.

The Agency currently has 411 posts, with 27 recruitment competitions commenced since January 2018. 18 of the 19 new posts approved in January have been recruited for and recruitment is underway for the remaining position. The Committee was advised that the Workforce plan 2019 is being discussed with DCCAE with a focus on a small number of priority posts to address Licence and Enforcement requirements.

Laura appraised the Committee on the recent launches of: The Priority Sites Report; the Urban Waste Water Report; Focus on Private Water Supplies 2017; Water Quality in 2017: an indicators report; Greenhouse Gas inventory; and Household Waste Characterisation Campaign report.

The Committee was updated on the OECD Review which will analyse the EPA’s governance arrangements and information gathering by the OECD will continue

until the end of 2019. Laura informed the Committee that the Review will benchmark the EPA's governance arrangements against OECD Best Practice Principles and publication of the findings is set for 2020.

Gerard O'Leary gave a brief presentation on the results of the EPA Employee Engagement Survey and the Red C Stakeholder survey. Gerard appraised the Committee on the key findings of the Engagement survey and identified internal communications and enhancing a climate of innovation as two areas that the Agency will focus on. The Committee was informed that the survey will be re-run every two years. The Director of Office of Communications and Corporate Services also updated the Committee on the results of the recent Red C stakeholder survey which provided positive feedback on the perception of the Agency among members of the public. Gerard informed the Committee that the survey identified the need to improve engagement within the 18-34 years' cohort.

Discussion

A member stated that ideas are progressing on the possibility of holding a 'Climate Action week', which was suggested at a recent Advisory Committee meeting. Laura Burke informed the Committee of her recent appearance at an Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action and recommended linking in with the National Dialogue on Climate Action for guidance on the event. Another member queried progress on the *All of Government Climate Action Plan*. The Committee was informed that DCCA is leading out on the development of the Plan. A member raised the contribution of actions in the agriculture sector to the Climate Plan and stated that a number of agricultural organisations have recently communicated their commitment to the Plan.

Action: It was agreed that Communications would be a topic on the Agenda for the next Advisory Committee meeting.

5. **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

Agenda Item 7 was heard next followed by Agenda Item 5

6. **End of Term Report**

Laura Burke addressed the Committee on the content for the End of Term report and assured the members that the EPA will provide all the necessary information for its completion. It was identified that the report not only is a useful reflection of the term of a Committee but is also useful for inducting members to the next Advisory Committee. A member suggested reviewing the main themes from the past Committee recommendations and setting out a small number of themes for the future direction. Laura Burke concurred with the members that the report should focus on achievements of the Committee and the next steps for the future.

Action: The End of Term Report and progressing its preparation will be discussed at the next meeting of the Advisory Committee.

7. **Office of Environmental Sustainability**

Presentation on Reframing the National Waste Prevention Programme

Mary Frances Rochford, Programme Manager, gave a presentation providing an overview of the Agency's review of the National Waste Prevention Programme (NWPP). The presentation provided details on the:

- The background of the NWPP

- The composition of the NWPP
- Current arrangements
- NWPP review
- Review components
- Inputs to the new NWPP
- Findings from the review
- Priority topics for 2019
- Future NWPP structure
- Pillar 1: Innovation and Demonstration
- Pillar 2: Programme delivery through strategic partnerships

Discussion

A member reflected that some areas of the NWPP are more established than the newer areas of plastics and the circular economy. Another member referred to the potential use of a ‘deposit and return’ scheme to address the issue of plastics. Mary Frances Rochford informed the Committee that a successful plastics event was held recently and that the Department of Communications, Climate Change and Environment is carrying out research in this area. She further commented that publication of the waste characterisation study will inform key activities and the aim to is achieve quick wins with existing infrastructure. A member queried engagement with other waste reduction programmes and on raising awareness with the public of other uses for composted material which will then feed into the circular economy. Eimear Cotter advised of the ongoing engagement with organisations, including the business community, aimed at illustrating the benefits of the circular economy. A Committee member queried the use of metrics in waste prevention. Mary Frances advised of the challenges in measuring waste reduction but that the NWPP aims to scope out projects using measurable criteria where possible, but appraising behaviour change can be more difficult. Laura Burke commented that the build-up of metrics and data will contribute to the illustration of a broader picture on waste and waste prevention.

Mary Frances informed the Committee that both pillars in the revised NWPP aim to also respond to emerging issues. The Committee was advised that the NWPP aims to increase awareness on plastics, construction and demolition waste. A member proposed increasing engagement with local communities and local authorities and developing metrics on waste diversion. Eimear Cotter informed the Committee that the NWPP enables engagement and supports Local Authorities in a variety of ways including the local authority waste prevention network (LAPN) and research projects.

Action: The Programme is to consider the recommendations, suggestions and comments of the Committee.

8. Office of Environmental Sustainability

The role of the EPA in the regulation of GMOs

Bernadette Murray gave a presentation providing an overview of the Agency’s role in the regulation of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). The presentation provided details on the:

- GMO Legislation
- Other bodies involved in GMO regulation
- GMO Definitions
- Register of GMO use in Ireland
- Types of registered premises in Ireland
- Enforcement – site inspections

- Deliberate release of GMOs – Part B & Part C
- New breeding techniques

Discussion

A member queried the expertise the Agency has, to assess the deliberate release of GMOs. Bernie Murray informed the Committee that the EPA has the necessary expertise and that the GMO Advisory Committee also has considerable expertise to support the Agency. The environmental risk assessment of certain applications is sent to the GMO Advisory Committee for review and/or additional specialist expertise can be sought if required. A Committee member raised the issue of compliance and self-reporting. Bernie advised that annual reports and site visits provide evidence of good compliance and the unit engages with bio safety officers. A member enquired about the public perception of GMOs and how the Agency engages with interest groups. Bernie advised the Committee that adverts are placed to advise the public of GMO clinical trial applications and Class 3/4 GMM applications, all information relating to GMO trials is available on the EPA website and all GMO registers are available for viewing in EPA HQ. A member queried regulation in GM crops and new technologies such as the use of Crispr Technology. Bernie informed the Committee that the European Court of Justice (ECJ) had ruled that organisms obtained by new mutagenesis techniques (such as CRISPR) would be regulated as GMOs. The ECJ decision cannot be reversed. The impact of Brexit was raised by a Committee member and whether a different regulatory system will exist in the UK to the EU. Bernie advised the Committee that the indicators are positive that the UK will retain its regulatory system in this area but that this will be determined in due course.

Action: No specific actions were identified

9. **Any Other Business**

(i) Presentations

Action: The Board Secretary will circulate the presentations from today to the Advisory Committee.

(ii) Topics for future meetings

Suggested topics for future meetings include:

- Communication & Engagement; Update on the National Dialogue on Climate Action
- Waste; the OECD Review

(iii) Next Meeting

The next Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday 21st March, 2019.

Action: The Board Secretary will circulate the dates and locations for 2019 meetings to all members.

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

The meeting concluded.