

The 9th meeting of the 7th EPA Advisory Committee was held on Thursday, 21st March 2019, in the EPA Headquarters, Johnstown Castle Estate, County Wexford.

Members Present: Laura Burke (Chair), Seán Finan, Cara Augustenborg, Rónán Kennedy, Elaine Nevin and Áine Ryall (via video conference).

In attendance: Gerard O’Leary, Ray Cullinane and Jonathan Derham.

Apologies: Colette Byrne, Seán Finlay, Ina Kelly and Harold Kingston.

Secretary: Mary Donohoe

1. **Introductions**

Laura Burke welcomed the Advisory Committee to Wexford for their 9th meeting.

2. **Approval of the Agenda**

The adoption of the Agenda was approved.

3. **Minutes of Meeting held on 14 December 2018**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 December 2018 were approved.

4. **Emerging Issues**

Laura Burke informed the Committee that the Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment is considering options for the replacement of the vacant positions on the Advisory Committee.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that the Agency’s Budget for 2019 has not yet been finalised as confirmation of the Environment Fund allocation is still outstanding. Laura also advised that the C&AG Audit of 2018 accounts will commence shortly.

The Committee were provided with an update on staffing numbers and the ongoing recruitment competitions. Laura informed the Committee that the Agency are still engaging with the Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment (DCCA) on a small number of priority posts to address Licence and Enforcement requirements. The Committee were updated on the possible new functions and work for the Agency such as: Peat extraction and the National Ecosystems Monitoring Network.

The Committee was advised that the Work Programme for 2019 has been approved by the Board and that amendments to the Performance Delivery Agreement are being agreed with DCCA. Laura informed the Committee that a Memorandum of Funding is being finalised with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government on Water funding. The Committee was informed that the Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Committee will complete his term in June and a replacement Chair and new member will be appointed thereafter.

The Committee were updated on the review of the Competency Framework, a key priority of the Human Resource Development Strategy, which is being developed in consultation with EPA staff. The Committee were updated on the external review of the Agency which is being conducted by the OECD and is being led out by Gerard O’Leary. The next OECD fact finding mission will take place in June, followed by a presentation of the report to the Network of Regulators in November 2019 and publication of the Review in 2020.

Laura appraised the Committee on the range of projects to be funded under the EPA Research programme. The Committee were updated on the environmental queries

handled by the Queries unit and recent launches and publications of; the Story of your stuff competition, the partnership with the Rediscovery Centre in Ballymun, the National Priority Sites list, and publication of the *Year in Review*. Laura also mentioned the upcoming activities such as; the inaugural EPA National Climate Conference in Dublin on 15 May; and the annual EPA Water Conference in Galway on 29 and 30 May 2019.

Discussion

A member commended the EPA for the quality and content of the *Year in Review* publication. A member queried the on-line availability of the EPA Annual Accounts. Laura informed the Committee that the Annual Accounts are included in the annual report and the 2017 Accounts have recently been published.

Action:

The Board Secretary will circulate a copy of the draft Compliance and Enforcement Policy to the Committee for comment.

An invitation will issue to all Committee members for:

- The EPA National Climate Conference
- The EPA National Water Event 2019
- The Environment Ireland Conference (details TBC)

5. **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

6. **End of Term Report**

Laura Burke reiterated to the Committee that the EPA will provide all the necessary information required to support its completion. A member suggested the report should identify a number of key environmental concerns, such as: legislative issues; waste; role clarity for the EPA and Local Authorities; leadership in Climate Action; water quality; budgets; and environmental impacts on human health. The Committee agreed that Aine Ryall will prepare an initial draft of the report.

Action:

Aine Ryall will circulate a framework document to the Committee in advance of the next meeting on 12 June, to facilitate discussion at the meeting and to facilitate drafting of the final document.

The **Board Secretary** will circulate a copy of the following documents to the Committee:

- Copy of the 6th EPA Advisory Committee report to the Minister, for reference;
- Updated list setting out what actions the EPA has taken as a result of recommendations made at meetings of the current Advisory Committee;
- Link to the approved minutes of the Advisory Committee meetings.

7. **Office of Communications and Corporate Services**

Presentation on EPA Communications with Stakeholders

Ray Cullinane gave a presentation providing an overview of the Agency's communications with Stakeholders. The presentation provided details on:

- The EPA Communications Strategy and Planning
- Engaging with our stakeholders
- Examples of our communications in practice
- Sample of current communications initiatives
- Ideas and suggestions from Advisory Committee

Discussion

A Committee member queried the level of engagement and environmental communication with primary and secondary schools and the issues around literacy and assimilating scientific information by a younger cohort. Ray Cullinane informed the Committee that the EPA partners with organisations with a strong presence in the educational space such as Science and Technology in Action. The Committee was apprised of the strategic partnerships with Eco-Unesco, An Taisce (Globe programme), Junior Achievement Ireland and workshops delivered to schools during Science week.

A member queried the EPA presence on social media platforms. Ray informed the Committee that the EPA uses a number of social media platforms to engage with the public and is addressing the challenges of presenting information in a useable format for younger cohorts on social media. Another member raised the issue of reaching members of the public who are not connecting with messaging on climate change and environmental protection. Ray advised the Committee that the EPA uses a wide range of options to engage with the public including social media, the EPA website, surveys and the climate dialogue. Laura commented that the EPA also utilises the media and other stakeholders to transfer key messages. A member recommended the use of 'Media champions' from non-environmental backgrounds to engage with the public. The member further recommended the establishment of an Environmental Education Fund to capture innovative initiatives from young people and schools.

Another member suggested using the medium of local radio to engage the public and queried the EPA strategy for this medium. Ray Cullinane informed the Committee that the EPA actively sends representatives on radio to cover a variety of topics and frequently uses local papers for Press Releases. Ray agreed that the Communications Team would investigate further opportunities to use local mediums to engage with the public.

A Committee member raised the issue of metrics and measuring behaviour change from media campaigns. Ray advised the Committee that the EPA reviews the impact of each media campaign.

A member queried the extent of information provided by the EPA in the Irish language. Ray informed the Committee that due to resource implications only a selection of press releases and publications are currently available in the Irish language but that the EPA have willing spokespersons who communicate in Irish with the public and with Irish broadcasters as required.

A member mentioned the current review of the website and recommended a review of twitter use. Laura advised the Committee that a review of twitter use is scheduled for 2019 in addition to monitoring all communication mediums.

Action: The Communications Team will investigate opportunities to use local radio and local press to engage with the public.

8. **Office of Environmental Sustainability**

The National Dialogue on Climate Action & State of the Environment Report

Jonathan Derham, Programme Manager, gave a presentation providing an update on the National Dialogue on Climate Action and the State of the Environment Report. The presentation provided details on

Part I

- Aims of the National Dialogue on Climate Action
- NDCA Work Programme 2019
- NDCA Evolution and Lessons Learned
- Ongoing activities to drive the work programme

Part II

- State of Our Environment Reporting
- State of Our Environment journey
- 2016 SOER key messages and media highlights
- The SOER in 2020
- Using DPSIR Integrated Assessment Model
- 2020 SOER Outline Structure and timeline
- 2020 SOER Communications and Policy

Discussion

Part I

A member queried the role of the National Dialogue on Climate Action as part of the national response to Climate Change. Jonathan informed the Committee that the current role of the NDCA is undefined until the finalisation and publication of the *All of Government Climate Action Plan*. Jonathan advised that the Plan will provide clarity on whether the Dialogue should have a direct or support role in Climate Change activities and the dialogue process. He further advised that the EPA has had positive communications with the Department on the matter.

A member asked whether further regional dialogue meetings are planned. Jonathan advised that three were planned for the first quarter of 2019 (Kilkenny, Dublin & Claremorris), but there were put on hold until after the All of Government Plan. It is expected they will recommence later in the year.

A member stated the importance of engaging with local communities. Jonathan Derham advised the Committee that engaging with communities on Climate Change is essential, and in that regard two pieces of analysis were commissioned by EPA. The first was an academic and practitioner led workshop in UCC and the second a workshop in association with the Climate Action Regional Offices on local engagement processes. These outputs are available if desired. A member raised the importance of engaging with sectoral groups, such as Macra na Feirme, in addition to local communities. Another member queried additional opportunities to engage younger groups in the Dialogue, such as Foroige. Jonathan informed the Committee that all groups are actively targeted but that the inclusion of new groups is always welcome; there was a greater involvement of young people in the Tralee event. Jonathan informed the Committee that the NDCA are considering a Climate conference specifically aimed at youth participation for later in 2019 (subject to the All of Government Plan).

Part II

A member queried if there are plans to publish a copy of the SOER specifically for young people. Jonathan Derham advised the Committee there are no current plans to publish a version of the SOER targeted specifically at youth but agreed that young people are a key audience for the report. He informed the Committee that consideration will be given in the media and communications plan to engage with this audience. Jonathan noted that the IrelandsEnvironment.ie web site which is the front face of the SOER on the web is designed in a very accessible way, and that the youth focussed 'The Story of Your Stuff' competition is specifically designed to draw young people to this web location. Another member queried if an Irish translation of the SOER will be available to the public. Jonathan informed the Committee the non-technical summary will be available in Irish and where possible additional communication tools will be used to engage with audiences through Irish. Another member raised the importance of highlighting contextual issues in the SOER, such as Biodiversity. Jonathan informed the Committee there are several contextual issues that will be addressed by the SOER and it is one of a number of mechanisms to address the challenges of Biodiversity. A member raised

the use of infographics and visual images as a powerful way to communicate scientific and technical information. Jonathan advised the Committee there are plans to adopt an innovative approach to use of visuals in SOER2020, such as use of *Mapbook* and that consideration will be given to other innovations in this area.

Action: The NDCA will investigate opportunities to engage with sectoral groups as part of the dialogue. The communications plan for the SOER will address the engagement of consider broader audiences.

9. **Any Other Business**

(i) Presentations

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

(ii) Topic for discussion

The Topic of EPA budget trends and fees will be discussed at the next meeting.

(iii) Next Meeting

The next Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 12th June, 2019 in Cloughjordan Ecovillage.

Action: The Board Secretary will circulate the agenda for afternoon presentations from the Cloughjordan Ecovillage to all members.

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

The meeting concluded.