

The 1st meeting of the 8th EPA Advisory Committee was held on Wednesday, 28th April 2021, via video conference from EPA Headquarters, Johnstown Castle Estate, County Wexford.

Members Present: Laura Burke (Chair), Aebhín Cawley (via Video Conference), Thomas Cooney (via Video Conference), Brendan Dunford (via Video Conference), Aoife Foley (via Video Conference), Frances Lucy (via Video Conference), Elaine Mahon (via Video Conference), Laure Marignol (via Video Conference); Yvonne Mullooly (via Video Conference), Elaine Nevin (via Video Conference), Sadhbh O'Neill (via Video Conference) & John Wenger (via Video Conference).

In attendance: Gerard O'Leary (via Video Conference), Micheál Lehane (via Video Conference), Eimear Cotter (via Video Conference), Tom Ryan (via Video Conference) & Sharon Finegan (via Video Conference).

Secretary: Mary Donohoe

1. **Welcome & Introductions**

(i) ***Welcome***

The Chairperson, Laura Burke, Director General of the EPA, welcomed the Members to the first meeting of the 8th EPA Advisory Committee. She said she was delighted to have such a wide representation on the Committee and was looking forward to their contribution to the work of the Agency during their term of office. She noted the work of the Agency in protecting and improving Ireland's Environment and highlighted the important role of the Committee to make recommendations to the Agency, or to the Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications concerning the functions and activities of the Agency, as set out in Section 28 of the EPA Act 1992 (as amended).

Laura noted that all presentations will be issued to Committee members in advance of meetings and engagement is planned with the Committee in the development of the EPA Strategy. Laura invited members to consider and nominate topics of interest for future meetings.

(ii) ***Tour de table' of the Advisory Committee***

The Chairperson invited each Committee member to give a brief biographical introduction. Laura noted that each member has provided a biography for publication on the EPA website.

2. **Experience of Membership on the Advisory Committee**

Elaine Nevin provided an insight into her role as a member of the 6th and 7th EPA Advisory Committees.

Elaine Nevin spoke of the privilege to work on the Committee and stressed how quickly the three-year term passes. She highlighted the importance of having a specific work programme which would best support the Agency on priority areas of interest. She identified the added value of the Committee in terms of the diversity of views and expertise and she outlined how the previous Committee's expertise, recommendations and inputs were factored into various programmes and to

delivering the EPA Strategy. She noted that the Agency provides operational updates and feedback on the Committee's recommendations during the three-year term. The Committee also provides assistance to the Agency with emerging issues.

Elaine outlined the process for compiling the End-of Term Report to the Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications including the consideration to nominating a sub-group to write the Report. She suggested the Committee may wish to consider other options to engage with the Minister during their term, such as an annual or mid-term report. Elaine stressed the importance and complexity of the Agency's work and the Committee's opportunity to highlight their areas of expertise.

The Chairperson commented on how the Committee's input and recommendations are valued and reflected in the work of the Agency.

3. **Presentation on the Operation of the EPA and Advisory Committee**

The Chairperson gave an overview of the functions and activities of the EPA, including: the vision, mission, legislative background, functions, structure and budget. She discussed the working arrangements with the various Departments and other key stakeholders. There was detailed discussion on the governance, independence, transparency and accountability of the EPA, particularly relating to licensing and enforcement issues. The Chairperson further discussed the role of the Advisory Committee, the recommendations to the Minister from the 7th EPA Advisory Committee, the review of the EPA by the OECD and the evolving plan for the development of the next EPA Strategy.

4. **Overview of EPA Offices**

(i) Office of Communications & Corporate Services

Mr Gerard O'Leary, Deputy Director General, gave a detailed overview of the work of the Office of Communications & Corporate Services including information on the wide range of activities undertaken by each of the Office units such as: energy reduction across EPA buildings; use of Social Media; the new EPA Website; HRD Strategy 2017 – 2021; Health, Safety & Welfare and the Covid-19 response.

(ii) Office of Evidence & Assessment

Dr Micheál Lehane, Director, gave a detailed overview of the work of the Office of Evidence & Assessment including information on the wide range of activities undertaken by each of the Office units such as: State of Environment Reporting; public information on the Environment; Strategic Environmental Assessment; data science and analytics; the new Research Framework 2021-2030; water management and catchment science; and hydrometrics and groundwater assessments.

(iii) Office of Radiation Protection and Environmental Monitoring

Dr Micheál Lehane, Director, gave a detailed overview of the work of the Office of Radiation Protection and Environmental Monitoring including information on the wide range of activities undertaken by each of the Office units such as: emergency preparedness & nuclear safety; Radon & Citizen Science; Non Ionising Radiation, chemicals & noise; air quality; radiation monitoring programmes; and the EPA Water Laboratories.

(iv) Office of Environmental Enforcement

Dr Tom Ryan, Director, gave a detailed overview of the work of the Office of Environmental Enforcement including information on the wide range of activities undertaken by each of the Office units such: enforcement of licensed sites; waste

water discharge enforcement; drinking water enforcement; Radiological Protection regulation; and Local Authority oversight.

(v) ***Office of Environmental Sustainability***

Dr Eimear Cotter, Director, gave a detailed overview of the work of the Office of Environmental Sustainability including information on the wide range of activities undertaken by each of the Office units such as: Environmental licensing; Climate change and the circular economy; the Yale University ‘Climate Change in the Irish Mind’ survey; waste statistics for Ireland; and the National Waste Prevention Programme.

Following each presentation, the discussions identified various topics of interest to the members of the Committee including;

- Public Information - Translating science to understandable and relevant information;
- Stakeholder Engagement and Citizen Science;
- Celebrating Ireland’s Environment – the EPA role;
- Enforcement of Environmental Law;
- the EPA Research Programme;
- Non Toxic Environment / Chemicals Strategy;
- EPA/ Yale University Project on ‘Climate Change in the Irish Mind’; and
- the EPA Corporate Strategy.

It was decided that members would identify topics of interest ahead of the next meeting and they would develop an agreed Work Programme. Presentations will be made by the appropriate staff of the Agency to future meetings of the Advisory Committee which will help clarify and expand on the topics and issues raised at each meeting.

5. **Future Meeting Dates/Agenda**

The Committee were advised that meetings are held quarterly and that meetings will be held remotely until the Governments Covid-19 pandemic restrictions are eased. It is anticipated the Committee will be able to meet in person in EPA Headquarters or one of the regional inspectorates later this year. The members noted the proposed dates for the next three meetings as follows:

- i. End of June (TBC) – remotely via MS Teams*
- ii. Monday, 13th September 2021 - TBA*
- iii. Friday, 3rd December 2021 - TBA*

The Chairperson informed the members that the Agenda and documentation for all subsequent meetings will be emailed to the members.

6. **Any Other Business**

(i) ***Request for member biographies to be sent to the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC)***

The Committee was appraised of a request from DECC to post a short biography of each member on their new boards page on Gov.ie, where all recent appointments to Boards/Statutory Committees under the Department are being recorded as a requirement under the DPER Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards. Members are to advise the Agency if they do not wish their information to be shared with DECC for this purpose.

(ii) ***Standing Orders***

The members were advised that the Standing Orders will be revised to allow for use of electronic communications for meetings and for attendance of members by video conference. Additional wording will also cover Conflicts of Interest. The draft text will be circulated to members for comment prior to updating the Standing Orders.

(iii) Declaration of interests

'Declaration of interests' will be a standing item on all Advisory Committee Agendas.

The members' attention was drawn to the requirements under the EPA Act relating to Declaration of Interests and every member was requested to ensure that they sign the declaration form and return it to Mary Donohoe before the next meeting. If a member fails to do so he/she will be unable to attend the meeting.

Members were reminded of the importance of Confidentiality regarding their role on the Advisory Committee. The EPA is an open, transparent organisation and is covered by the terms of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, 1997 and the Access to Information on Environment Regulations, 1993. However, within the workings of the Committee, it is essential that any discussions by the members at their meetings are confidential should be treated as such, unless otherwise agreed.

(iv) EPA Events

All invitations for EPA events will be issued from the Office of Director General.

(v) Press Releases / Publications

It was noted that email addresses for members will be shared with the Communications Unit and the Research Programme and members will be contacted to 'opt-in' to receive EPA press releases/mail shots and publications.

The Chairperson recapped on the areas of interest and topics for further discussion. She committed to setting out the various topics in a Work Programme and invited the members to submit any additional items for consideration at future meetings.

The Chairperson thanked the members of the Committee for their contributions to the discussion and their attendance at the meeting.

This concluded the business of the meeting.