

The 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the 8<sup>th</sup> EPA Advisory Committee was held on Friday, 25<sup>th</sup> June 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), Frances Lucy (via Video Conference), Elaine Mahon (via Video Conference), Elaine Nevin (via Video Conference), Sadhbh O'Neill (via Video Conference) & John Wenger (via Video Conference).

In attendance: Gerard O'Leary, Micheál Lehane, Stephen Fennell (via Video Conference), Trudi Furlong (via Video Conference), Andy Fanning (via Video Conference) & Stephanie Long (via Video Conference).

Apologies: Aoife Foley, Laure Marignol & Yvonne Mullooly.

Secretary: Mary Donohoe

1. **Introductions**

Laura Burke welcomed the Advisory Committee for their 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting.

2. **Approval of the Agenda**

The adoption of the Agenda was approved.

3. **Minutes of Meeting held on 28 April 2021**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 April 2021 were approved.

4. **Disclosure of Interests**

There were no disclosures of interests declared.

5. **Emerging Issues**

Laura Burke appraised the Committee on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Agency over the past 15 months. The Committee were informed that EPA staff demonstrated remarkable efforts to deliver on the Work Programme, with people working in a variety of ways, whether from home, in EPA buildings or on fieldwork. It was noted that staff often had to balance significant additional personal and family responsibilities to ensure the continuation of essential EPA work. Laura noted that the critical work of the Agency continued in compliance with Government restrictions.

The Chairperson updated the Committee on the three-strand approach by the Agency to transition out of the pandemic including the phased return to EPA buildings, ongoing changes to ways of working, and developing the EPA's home working policy. Laura informed members that it is anticipated staff will begin returning to EPA buildings in September 2021. Laura also advised the Committee that some of the new ways of working have become embedded in the Agency over the last 18 months and have the potential to effectively deliver the EPA work programme into the future e.g. using tools and skills such as virtual meetings and online collaboration for meetings that previously required attendance in person leading to reduced travel to meetings, saving both time and benefitting the

environment. Conversely, Laura acknowledged that the experience of the pandemic may also have shown areas where in-person collaboration and meetings are a better option than any virtual alternative.

The Chairperson provided the Committee with an update on the EPA's budget and noted that income and expenditure are in line with expectations and similar to previous years. The Committee were informed that the C&AG Audit for 2020 is now complete and a clean audit certificate has issued. Laura advised the Committee that the estimates for 2022 are being prepared and will be submitted to the Department of Environment, Climate & Communications (DECC) in due course.

Laura also appraised the Committee on the development of the new EPA strategy which was paused during the Covid-19 pandemic. Laura stated that there is an opportunity to incorporate learnings and implications from the pandemic and arrangements are in place to resume the process in the Autumn. Laura confirmed there will be opportunities for engagement with the Advisory Committee during the process, in addition to planned stakeholder consultation.

Laura appraised the Committee on the recent launch of: the 'Story of your stuff' secondary school's competition; the EPA Research Call; Ireland's Air Pollutant emissions 1990-2030; Ireland's Greenhouse Gas Emissions Projections (2020-2040), Radon survey findings and the Bathing Water Quality report. The Committee were informed of recent virtual events including the EPA National Water Event held on 16 & 17 June and the EPA Climate Conference 2021 held on 23 & 24 June.

### ***Discussion***

A wide ranging discussion was had including: the EPA response to the HSE cyber-attack; raising awareness of indoor air quality; future moves to virtual / hybrid meetings and events post-pandemic to reduce environmental footprint; options to utilise behavioural psychology resources to raise environmental awareness; and the status of the EPA workforce plan.

### **Action:**

The Office of Radiation Protection and Environmental Monitoring will provide an update to the Advisory Committee on the Clean Air Strategy later in the year.

#### **6. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

#### **7. Standing Orders**

The Advisory Committee approved the updated Standing Orders allowing for the use of electronic communications for meetings and attendance by members by video conference.

#### **8. Office of Communications and Corporate Services**

##### ***Translating Science: the EPA Website***

Dr Stephen Fennell, Programme Manager and Trudi Furlong, Programme Officer, Office of Communications and Corporate Services gave a presentation on the EPA website redevelopment including a practical demonstration of the new EPA mobile website.

### ***Discussion***

A discussion was had on: the importance of the website as a portal for up-to-date environmental information; the website as an essential tool for communicating environmental information to target audiences with differing needs; options for linking to separate areas of the website; the evolving nature of the website and the need for continuous improvement in response to user's needs; exploring alternative ways to direct people to the website; the importance of making data and information easily accessible; mapping specific local environmental information; and delivering real-time measurements on air quality, water quality etc.

**Action:**

The Communications Team to consider the recommendations, suggestions and comments of the Committee and to investigate:

- making EPA conference material quickly available on the website;
- use of Blogs to direct traffic to the website;
- holding focus groups with young people to harness their input and opinions;
- developing 'My local environment';
- reducing the number of EPA twitter accounts; and
- consolidating the EPA microsites into the main EPA website where possible.

9. **Office of Radiation Protection and Environmental Monitoring**  
***Citizen Science in the EPA***

Andy Fanning, Programme Manager and Stephanie Long, Senior Scientific Officer, Office of Radiation Protection and Environmental Monitoring 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:

- what is Citizen Science?;
- what is Citizen Science in the EPA?;
- objectives of Citizen Science in the EPA;
- key Citizen Science Projects undertaken including the Globe Programme and Clean Air Together; and
- the future direction of Citizen Science.

***Discussion***

A discussion was had on; enhancing community and public engagement in the Citizen Science programme; raising awareness of Citizen Science; developing opportunities to move Citizen Scientists from awareness into actions that contribute to environmental solutions; deepening existing partnerships and exploring other partnerships to broaden the Citizen Science programme; investigating new activities for the programme; identifying strategic and research opportunities; investigating viable links or trends between Citizen Science and Climate Change; making the programme more accessible to different demographic groups; removing resourcing as a barrier to expanding the programme; clarifying how the EPA can add value; and consideration of public suggestions on local environmental topics.

**Action:**

The Office of Radiation Protection and Environmental Monitoring to consider the recommendations, suggestions and comments of the Committee and to investigate:

- ways to support individuals to move to action from participation in the programme;
- broadening the range of stakeholder partnerships and clarity on how the EPA adds value

- adopting a more strategic approach to Citizen Science through identifying a small number of key projects with desired outcomes;
- broaden the spread and reach of the Citizen Science programme and the range of projects; and
- alternative topic selection such as detecting PM<sub>10</sub> in the air and seeking suggestions from the public.

10. **Any Other Business**

*(i) Next Meeting*

The next Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for Monday 13<sup>th</sup> September 2021. The meeting location will be confirmed in due course.

The meeting planned for Friday, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2021 needs to be rescheduled and a poll will issue to members to agree an alternative date.

*(ii) Topics*

Committee members recommended consideration of additional topics for future meetings:

- The role of the EPA in Biodiversity
- The role of the EPA and the approach to Peat Enforcement

*(iii) Public Consultation*

Members were informed that the public consultation on the development of the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development to 2030 is closing soon and that there is still an opportunity for members to make submissions.

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

This concluded the business of the meeting.