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Environmental Protection Agency, Ireland – Response to Consultation on the past, present and future of the European Research & Innovation Framework programmes 2014-2027

To whom it may concern:

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the public consultation on the European Research & Innovation (R&I) Framework Programmes 2014-2027 and the Strategic Plan of Horizon Europe (2025-2027). The EPA has been funding environmental research since 1994. The remit and focus of EPA-funded research is to generate knowledge and evidence that will support the design and implementation of effective and robust policy, evaluate its outcomes, and demonstrate its value. The importance of knowledge generation and robust evidence for public policy in terms of tackling environmental challenges has never been greater and we recognize the emphasis that has been placed on this in previous Framework Programmes. We strongly advocate for continued and strengthened importance being placed on research for policy and knowledge transfer to support the development and implementation of robust policy.

In 2021, the EPA published its framework for research programming over the next 10 years, *EPA Research 2030*. The key purpose of this is to put science and innovation at the centre of environmental protection in Ireland through the development and proactive transfer of knowledge. A key pillar of this strategy is support for collaboration and engagement, with policy makers research funders and other key stakeholders to identify key and emerging priorities, as well as fostering support and promotion of open innovation and information exchange. In addition, the EPA commits to actively support Ireland's participation in EU R&I Programmes as well as to engage with and influence the European R&I landscape.

Below summarises key areas where the EPA has been active within the European R&I Framework Programmes 2014-2027 and development of the European Research Area (ERA).

- **Climate Change:** The EPA is actively involved in JPI Climate, which was established in 2011 and has subsequently successfully developed into a key actor in the ERA by jointly advancing climate research. It has spanned multiple Framework Programmes and the EPA currently holds the Chair of JPI Climate, represented by Frank McGovern. Through JPI Climate the EPA

has contributed to the strategic direction of climate change research in Europe, and been active in flagship initiatives in Horizon Europe, e.g., in advancing the EU roadmap on Climate Services, as well as other priority areas, including with global partners under the Belmont Forum. While JPI Climate has largely acted to advance joint calls either autonomously or in EC co-funded collaborative projects (e.g., through Joint Transnational Calls) it has also acted to enhance the exchange of knowledge between science, policy makers, and practitioners. This has been developed through in Knowledge Hubs that focus on key challenges, e.g., sea-level rise and the understanding of this for Europe. Through Coordinated Support Actions, JPI Climate aims to develop these further with the objective to accelerate the transfer of knowledge from science-to-policy and actions.

- **Water** – The EPA has been actively involved in various strategic coordination initiatives on water research across Framework Programme 7, Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe. As part of JPI Water, the EPA previously facilitated its co-chairing and, during that time, led the development of Water JPI Strategic Research & Innovation Agenda 2025 and 2030 Water JPI Vision. Our participation in this initiative supported participation of Irish climate researchers in EC co-funded collaborative projects (e.g., through ERAnets and Joint Transnational Calls) and facilitated international collaboration and cooperation.

Within Horizon Europe, the EPA is a partner on the successful proposal to establish the Water4All Partnership under the Cluster 6 Work Programme 2021-2022. We are actively engaged in this partnership, which is still in its early stages, but envisage participating in joint activities including the funding of Joint Transnational Calls.

- **Biodiversity** – The EPA is a member of the General Assembly of the Biodiversa Network and was part of the successful submission to establish the Biodiversa+ Partnership under Horizon Europe. Similarly to the initiatives outlined above, the EPA actively engages in this partnership, particularly through the Joint Transnational Calls to support Irish researchers to collaborate across Europe in EC-co-funded projects. It is noted that while the EPA is the only representative from Ireland on the Governing Board, we coordinate with others national stakeholders in the provision of funding for projects and technical expertise (e.g., Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the Marine Institute and the National Parks and Wildlife Service).
- **Radiation** – As well as our role as a funding agency in the initiatives outlined above, EPA also participates as a research partner in EC-funded projects, for example, the European Joint Programme for the Integration of Radiation Protection Research (CONCERT), the European Partnership for Radiation Protection Research (PianoForte) and the RadoNorm project under EURATOM Horizon 2020 aimed at managing risk from radon. EPA actively monitors opportunities to be involved in EU Research initiatives and is currently considering participation in other Horizon Europe Partnerships.
- **LIFE Projects** – While not a part of the EU R&I Framework Programmes, the EPA also participates in other EC-funded projects, such as those supported through the LIFE Programme, e.g., People and Peatlands, Waters of LIFE and LIFE Emerald.

As well as being a research funder and research partner, EPA has acted as a National Contact Point to support the participation of Irish researchers across all of the Framework Programmes (2014-2023) and is currently one of the National Contact Points for Cluster 6 of Pillar 2 of Horizon Europe. In this capacity, we work closely with colleagues from Departments and Agencies across Government within the National Contact Point Network. We also participate as a member of the Programme Committee

to contribute to the development of work programmes and to ensure its relevance to the remit of the EPA and to the Irish research community.

As is evident from the above, as well as from *EPA Research 2030*, the EPA places significant value on the European R&I Framework Programmes and the opportunity they represent for Ireland. As such, we look forward to continued involvement in the future. Specifically, we see benefit to the EPA's participation in terms of alignment of our research priorities to those at a European level, leveraging additional funding for our research programme, building and developing relationships with relevant European organisations and structures, as well as benefitting from the generation of new evidence and knowledge to inform policy. Through the EPA's engagement in EU R&I Programmes, the Irish research community also benefits from Irish representation in international networks/partnerships, access to additional research funding, opportunities for capacity building and access to international infrastructure.

The EPA is supportive of the priorities identified in the Strategic Plan for Horizon Europe 2021-2024, and specifically the inclusion of the key strategic orientations ***Restoring Europe's ecosystems and biodiversity, and managing sustainably natural resources*** and ***Making Europe the first digitally enabled circular, climate-neutral and sustainable economy***. It is suggested that, in the new Strategic Plan, environmental protection be emphasized, as well as the restoration of our environment, ecosystems and biodiversity.

The EPA is also supportive of the mainstreaming of environmental, sustainability and climate considerations throughout the work programme. However, there are wider environmental considerations and societal aspects that could be considered more fully and incorporated across the future Strategic Plan and Work Programmes. For example, in the Strategic Plan 2021-2024, it is noted that Cluster 2 (Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society) is not included in the discussion of the strategic orientations mentioned above. Appropriate consideration of the social, economic, gender and cultural dimensions of environmental protection and climate change is essential to inform the development of robust policy that can successfully address these societal challenges in just and equitable ways. Related to this, more explicit promotion and support for inter- and trans-disciplinary research approaches will be important for funded research and innovation activities to effectively deliver societal impact.

The importance of knowledge generation and robust evidence for public policy in terms of tackling environmental challenges has never been greater and the EPA welcomes the inclusion of proactive transfer of knowledge to inform and support the implementation of policy in the Horizon Europe Strategic Plan and Work Programmes. The EPA would encourage this focus to be retained in the ongoing delivery of the Strategic Plan, as well as the development of indicators to measure the societal and policy impact of funded research.

The EPA sees significant value in participation in European strategic partnership activities such as those outlined above (i.e., JPIs, Horizon Europe Partnerships). The landscape in which these partnerships operate can, however, be complex; for example, in terms of the interaction and overlap between initiatives, as well as the diversity of funding opportunities for the R&I community. Other initiatives such as the Missions and the New European Bauhaus represent new and exciting developments within Horizon Europe, and while the ambitions are clear, entry points for involvement are more difficult to navigate. Simplification and clarity on engaging with these new instruments would be welcomed and may support wider engagement across all actors in the R&I community.



Finally, the simplifications that have already been implemented to the administration of participation in European R&I Framework Programmes are acknowledged and the development of the dashboards is welcome. The consultative approach to the preparation of the Work Programmes is also commended. Further streamlining of the administration, as well as continuous improvement of the participant portal, would be welcomed.

We thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the preparation of the next Strategic Plan of Horizon Europe (2025-2027) and are happy to contribute further if required. Responses to the associated survey will be submitted separately.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Tara Higgins'.

Dr Tara Higgins
Programme Manager
Office of Evidence and Assessment