

The 7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the 8<sup>th</sup> EPA Advisory Committee was held on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2022, in the EPA Headquarters, Johnstown Castle Estate, County Wexford.

Members present: Gerard O' Leary (Chair), Aebhín Cawley (via Video Conference), Thomas Cooney (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: Sharon Finegan – Agenda item 6.

Apologies: Laura Burke, Aoife Foley, Brendan Dunford & Yvonne Mullooly.

Secretary: Mary Donohoe.

1. **Approval of the Agenda**

Gerard O' Leary welcomed the Advisory Committee for their 7<sup>th</sup> meeting.

The adoption of the Agenda was approved.

2. **Minutes of Meeting held on 24 June 2022**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 June 2022 were approved.

3. **Disclosure of Interests**

There were no disclosures of interests declared.

4. **Emerging Issues**

The Chairperson congratulated Aebhín Cawley on her reappointment to the Committee for a second term from 1 July 2022 until 30 June 2025. Gerard advised that Laure Marignol's term ended on 30 June 2022, and the Minister is currently seeking nominations from prescribed bodies for her replacement. Gerard extended congratulations to Aoife Foley on her recent appointment as Professor in Queen's University.

Gerard O' Leary appraised the Committee of the six-month pilot on blended working with staff working up to a maximum of two days at home per week since 25 April 2022. Members were advised of the ongoing staff consultations and engagement. Gerard informed the Committee that the EPA expects to finalise a policy before year end.

The Committee were provided with an update on staffing numbers and the ongoing recruitment competitions. Gerard advised the Committee that Dr Tara Higgins was appointed as a new Programme Manager. Tara is assigned to the Office of Evidence and Assessment and will lead the EPA's next State of the Environment Report. The Committee were also informed that the Workforce Plan would be re-submitted to the

Department of Environment, Climate and Communications and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage next week.

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 purchase of the Castlebar building is being finalised.

The Chairperson appraised the Committee on recent communications issued by the EPA including: 'EPA National Priority Sites list', 'Urban Waste Water Treatment in 2021 Report', 'Drinking Water Quality in Public Supplies Report 2021' and 'Water Quality in Ireland 2016 – 2021 Report'. The Committee were informed of upcoming conferences and events including Environment, Health and Wellbeing Conference on 9 November, National EPA Air Event on 23 November and the Environmental Law Conference on 30 November.

### ***Discussion***

A wide-ranging discussion was had including:

- Blended working within the EPA;
- Delivering more shared research earlier to policy makers;
- Overcoming the challenges in stakeholder communication;
- Progress on peat enforcement activities and the National Peatlands Strategy;
- The potential role for the EPA to focus on successful environmental solutions in addition to providing scientific evidence (science to policy workshop);
- The revised estimate for EPA Budget from the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications; and
- The recently published Air Quality in Ireland Report.

### **Action:**

Committee to consider a dedicated meeting on the area of science to policy.

## **5. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

## **6. Office of Environmental Sustainability**

### ***Presentation on the role of the EPA in Energy Regulation***

Sharon Finegan, Director of the Office of Environmental Sustainability gave a presentation on the role of the EPA in Energy Regulation. The presentation provided details on:

- Role of the EPA in Energy Regulation;
- The EPA's interactions with the power generation industry;
- Scope of the EPA within this area; and
- Horizon scanning for new developments.

### ***Discussion/Comments***

A discussion was had on: the role of the EPA in energy regulation; identifying ways to streamline the process; ongoing developments at EU Level to improve industrial processes and reduce emissions.

## **7. End of Term Report**

A brief discussion was had on the approach to deliver an Advisory Committee End of Term Report to the Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications. To support drafting of the Report by the Committee, the Chairperson offered to provide information on the main issues considered by the Committee during its term of office. The Chairperson advised that two members of the committee are required to lead the drafting process. Elaine Nevin gave an update on the report completed by the previous Committee in December 2019. Yvonne Mullooly volunteered to be a lead author of the report at the previous meeting held in June 2022. Sadhbh O' Neill also volunteered for lead author role on the report. The chair advised that the ODG would supply a summary of topics discussed at the Advisory meetings and associated recommendations.

**Action:**

The Board Secretary will send a link to the previous End of Term Report to all Committee members for information.

8. **Any Other Business**

*(i) Next Meeting*

It was suggested to the Committee to move the next meeting, originally scheduled for December, to the second week in January 2023. January 11<sup>th</sup> was the preferred date of the majority of Committee members. The meeting will be held in the EPA Regional Inspectorate Office in Dublin and an invite will issue shortly. The 2023 meeting dates have been set and the Board Secretary will issue 'save the date' invitations to the Committee.

*(ii) Topics for Inclusion*

Topics for inclusion for the next meeting are:

- Presentation on the Circular Economy
- EPA FOI Statistics as part of the Chair's emerging issues discussion at the next meeting
- EPA Budget 2023

*(iii) Board Secretary*

The Committee noted that Ms Mary Donohoe has taken on a new role in the Office of Environmental Sustainability. It was also noted that Ms Elaine Kehoe would take over the duties of Board Secretary with effect from 22 November 2022.

This concluded the business of the meeting.