



An tÚdarás Rialála Limistéir Mhuirí
Maritime Area Regulatory Authority

Minutes of the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) Board Meeting

Date	04 March 2025
Venue	The Ormond Building, 31-36 Ormond Quay Upper, Dublin 7
Time	10:30 – 14:00
Chair	Mark Mellett Vice Admiral DSM (Rtd), Phd (MM)
Board Members Present	Ms. Karen Banks (KB) Dr. Ruth Brennan (RB) Mr. Philip Daly (PD) Mr. Patrick Gibbons (PG) Online Ms. Niamh Kenny (NK) Dr. James Massey (JM) Mr. Brendan McGrath (BMCG) Mr. Patrick Moran (PM) Online Mr. Paul O’Neil (PON)
In attendance	MARA Executive – Ms. Laura Brien (CEO), Ms. Sorcha Byrne (Secretary), Ms. Danielle O’ Dowd (DOD) Mr. Frank Ronan (FR) [Agenda Items 9&10] Mr. John Evans (JE) [Agenda Item 12]

Agenda Items

1. Non-Executive Session (10:30 – 10:45)

2. Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed board members with apologies from Alma Walsh. Matters raised during the non-executive session for discussion will be raised at the appropriate agenda items.

3. Declarations of Interest

None declared.

4. Minutes

4.1 Board Minutes - The Board approved the following resolution:

That at its meeting on 04 March 2025, the Board adopted the minutes of the MARA board meeting of 21 January 2025 attached at agenda item 4.1 with amendment.

4.2 ARC Minutes – The Board approved the following resolution:

That at its meeting on 04 March 2025, the Board adopted the minutes of the ARC meeting of 19 February 2025 attached at agenda item 4.2.

Action:

- Meeting papers to be circulated to allow as much time as possible for their review, increase advance circulation time to 5 working days prior to a board meeting.

- ARC will utilise written resolution process to approve minutes where there is a lengthy time lapse between ARC and Board meetings, so that the most up to date ARC minutes can be included in the Board papers.

5. Matters arising

5.1 Action Log

The Board reviewed outstanding actions from previous meetings noting:

- The Chair outlined exploratory discussions are underway with University College Cork about progressing a conference on the topic of dealing with the legal complexities in the maritime area.
- The CEO advised the consultancy work on the design process for the competitive MAC process is now underway with a date for the Board information workshop expected shortly.
- Outstanding work on the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee to conclude in advance of the next Board meeting with a Board approval to be sought via written resolution.

6 Governance Policies and Procedures

6.1 Review of Terms of Reference

The CEO and Secretary presented the review of the Terms of Reference. The Board acknowledged the work by the Executive and approved the suggested changes, confirming section 15 should contain revised wording addressing the Board's responsibility and referencing the Schedule of Matters as an appendix. The footer in the draft document to be removed and the reference updated to 5 working days for meeting papers circulation. Some additional edits to be recommended by the Board with a final version of the document put before the Board for approval via written resolution process.

6.2 Protected Disclosures Policy

The CEO and Secretary presented the Protected Disclosures Policy, highlighting additions recommended by the ARC. The Board put forward revisions on pages 13 & 20 and requested the Executive consider setting up a dedicated email to assist with making disclosures and enable the provision of disclosures to the Chairperson electronically.

The Board approved the following resolution:

That at its meeting on 04 March 2025, the Board approved the protected Disclosures Policy as appended to agenda item 6.2 with amendments.

Action:

- Establish e-mail option to receive protected disclosures.

7.0 Strategic Plan – Implementation and Progress Reporting

The CEO sought feedback from the Board on the reporting format developed by the Executive to track the implementation of the statement of strategy with an update provided for Q4 2024 and Q1 2025. The Board welcomed the approach and suggested enhancing the tracker with a RAG system and a comments column which would point sources of further information i.e. CEO report or risk register.

Action:

- Incorporate RAG system and comments column into the Statement of Strategy implementation tracker.

8.0 CEO Report

The CEO focused the Board's attention on the Executive summary, outlining work completed to date. Following on from discussions by the Board during the non-executive session, the focus of the Board

was on MAC and MUL application processes and gaining an understanding of the stages for both types of maritime authorisations. The conversation reflected on MARA's adherence to various legislative requirements including the application of the Habitats Directive and the undertaking of appropriate assessment. The CEO outlined the work undertaken to date in developing MARA's authorisations processes and procedures including the prioritisation system and constraints faced by the organisation such as the number of ecologists on hand to assess. The Board gave consideration of possible approaches, such as legislative amendments, that could enable maritime usage licence applications to be dealt with appropriately and swiftly.

Discussion halted and resumed when JE completed presentation of agenda item 12.

The Board expressed its support to the CEO to continue to advocate for a favourable solution for MARA to the provision of payroll, pension and HR services and system via the NSSO.

9.0 Risk Register

The Director of Corporate Affairs gave an overview of the risk register confirming the ARC had reviewed the register at its February meeting. The Board suggested the addition of two additional risks to the register (i) processes and procedures for the office fit out project (ii) reputational risk arising from current timeframe for MUL applications for academic research projects; and the addition of an indicator column next to the residual score column to enable the tracking of scoring to easily assess if score has gone up or down since last review of the register.

Action:

- Addition of two risks and a performance indicator arrow to the Risk Register.

10.0 Finance Matters

10.1 Financial Statements

The Board considered the draft financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2024 as presented by the Director of Corporate Affairs. The final financial statements will be presented to the Board for its approval at a future board meeting.

10.2 Management Accounts

The Director of Corporate Affairs presented the Q4 management accounts to the Board, drawing their attention to the different presentation of financial information from the information contained in the annual financial statements. The management accounts provide the Board with data on performance against budget.

10.3 Financial Procedures

The Director of Corporate Affairs presented four financial procedures (i) MARA Banking Procedure (ii) MARA Purchase to Pay (iii) MARA Fixed Asset Procedure and (iv) MARA Procurement Procedures which were recommended by the ARC for presentation to the Board. Feedback from the ARC will be logged by the Executive and combined with recommendations received from internal auditors. These will be incorporated at the next review opportunity. The Board approved the following resolution: That at its meeting on 04 March 2025, the Board approved the Finance Procedures as appended to agenda item 10.3.

11.0 ARC Report

The Chair of the ARC gave a verbal update on the work of the ARC, highlighting the engagement of the internal auditors and the approval by the ARC of the internal audit work programme and the outcome of the audit of internal financial controls. The Board expressed its appreciation to the ARC and to the Executive, specifically the finance team for their work to date.

12.0 Business Case – Development of Maritime Authorisations Viewer

The Director of Assessment, Research & Data presented the Maritime Authorisations Viewer (MAC) memo and business case outlining how this tool will facilitate the work MARA currently does and will bring datasets together in one place. MARA intend to make the MAV available to other regulatory bodies such as An Bord Pléanala and Coastal Planning Authorities. Following thorough consideration by the Board of the business case presented and potential alternative options, the Board approved the following resolution:

That at its meeting on 4 March 2025, the Board approved an agreement for the implantation of the Maritime Administration Viewer with the Marine Institute, subject to:

- the requirements of Circular 13/2014 (Management of and Accountability for Grants from Exchequer Funds) and satisfactory delivery of the requirements as document by MARA.
- Completion of the viewer in year one and maintenance in years 2 to 5.
- A total cost of no more than €151,348, with a year 1 (2025) cost of €110,598.
- Satisfactory approvals in line with the circulars and governance requirements in the Memo under “Next Steps” as appended to agenda item 12.0.

Discussion resumed in respect of agenda item 8.

The Board resumed consideration of the authorisation applications on hand and acknowledged there are a number of factors at play including resourcing. The Board recognise the potential risk in this area and want to collaborate with the Executive on a way forward.

Action:

- Establish a working group consisting of members of the Executive and Board (KB, RB, PON) to examine this matter further.

13.0 AOB

The Chair highlighted European Maritime Day will be taking place in May and encourage board members to attend.

The next Board Meeting is scheduled for the 06 May 2025 and will take place in Dublin, the autumn meeting will take place in Wexford.

ENDS.