An tÚdarás Rialála Limistéir Mhuirí
Maritime Area Regulatory Authority

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

Date	1 July 2025
Venue	Online
Time	10:30 – 14:00
Chair	Mark Mellett Vice Admiral DSM (Rtd), Phd (MM)
Board Members Present	Dr. Ruth Brennan (RB) Mr. Philip Daly (PD) Mr. Patrick Gibbons (PG) Ms. Niamh Kenny (NK) Mr. Brendan McGrath (BMCG) Mr. Paul O'Neill (PON) Dr. James Massey (JM)
In attendance	MARA Executive – Ms. Laura Brien (CEO), Ms. Sorcha Byrne, Ms. Danielle O'Dowd and Ms. Aisling Murray (Secretariat), Mr. Frank Ronan (FR), Mr. Eoin Leahy (EL)

Agenda Items

1. **Non-Executive Session**
   Matters raised during the non-executive session for discussion will be raised at the appropriate agenda items.

Action:

- Secretariat to provide information on the approval process of ARC member fees.
- Board to consider committee fees, ensuring congruence with the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies (the Code).

2. **Welcome and Apologies**
   Quorum in place. Apologies noted from Karen Banks, Patrick Moran and Alma Walsh. The Chair welcomed new members of the Executive, Eoin Leahy and Aisling Murray.

3. **Declarations of Interest**
   None declared. PON to recuse himself from agenda item 10.2.

4. **Minutes (Board meeting 06 May 2025)**
   Board Minutes approved with amendments to item 8.1 and 10.3.

5. **Matters Arising**
   5.1 Action Log
   The Board reviewed the action log.

Action:

- Consideration of professional fees expenditure for a future meeting agenda item.

5.2 MARA seal and signatories
The Board noted the memo at agenda item 5.2.

5.3 Note from Legal Services

The memo for information on a recent high court decision at agenda item 5.3 was noted by the Board.

6. CEO Report

The CEO focused the Board's attention on the Executive summary, outlining work completed to date. The Board discussed the status of applications numbers determined and application numbers on hand. It is perceived that the organisation is carrying a legacy of 8-10 months due to standing up procedures. The Board were aware of the risk arising from an expeditious start date for MARA. A challenge exists to comply with the timelines under the legislation and stakeholder feedback reflects this experience and a settling into a new regulatory regime. The CEO outlined actions taken i.e. recruitment processes to increase technical and environmental staff, approach to performance – cross-cutting arrangements in place, efficiencies in business, triage applicants, running two queues, introducing provisions under section 90 of the MAP Act. The Board recognised its role and responsibilities to both support and supervise the Executive, it has trust in the Executive's competence and will meet with the Executive in September.

7. Governance Matters

7.1 Establishment of a planning and performance sub-committee.

The Board approved in principle to proceed with the establishment of the planning and performance committee. The draft terms of reference were approved with amendment. Consistency of approach to fees for members to be determined in line with the Code. The appointment of an external member to be finalised.

Action:

- Executive to appoint the Secretariat for the committee and look to schedule an initial meeting in September.

8. Corporate Affairs including Finance Matter

8.1 Budget 2025 Ex Ante Business Case

The Director of Corporate Affairs presented a suite of ex-ante business cases (numbered 2-7) as per the requirements of the public spending code. The Board suggested on business case #3 – process improvement projects that the decision tree at point (c) should be capable of inhouse revision. Confirmation in respect of point (e) that the need is acknowledged and the analysis to be sought is for design requirements. An ongoing maintenance cost to be included in business case #5 - data management systems. The Board noted that several of the business cases are ICT related and there is a need for an overarching oversight approach. The Executive confirmed the ICT roadmap will assist with this and it is strengthened by internal authorisation and approval processes, noting any expenditure over €100k will be presented to the Board for its consideration and approval separately sought from this presentation.

The Board approved the business cases (numbered 2-7) as appended to agenda item 8.1.

8.2 ICT Roadmap

The Board approved the business case for the proposed investment in developing an ICT Roadmap for MARA and approval to publish a mini competition under the specified framework noting approval pertains to expenditure of €129k for consultancy costs.

8.3 Travel Policies

The Board approved the MARA Travel Policy and MARA Foreign Travel Policy.

Action:

- Secretariat to update T&S expenses form for board members on the governance platform to reflect updated circular.

8.4 New banking facilities
The Board approved the new banking facilities as outlined in the memo appended to agenda item 8.4.

9. Break

Note: PON left meeting for agenda item 10.

10. Policy & External Affairs

10.1 Co-operation Agreement
The Board noted the memo at agenda item 10.1 presenting the first such agreement with the Commissioner of Irish Lights.
10.2 MPPS Public Consultation
The Director of Policy and External Affairs presented the memo, with the Board discussions focusing on enforcement and need for a solution with congruence across enforcement agencies of the State. The Board approved MARA's response to the public consultation on the Marine Planning Policy Statement (MPPS).
10.3 Levy framework RFT
The Board approved the following resolution: "That at its meeting on 1 July 2025, the Board approved the publication of the RFT as outlined in the memo appended to agenda item 10.3.
10.4 Online stakeholder forum
The memo for information at agenda item 10.4 was considered by the Board, in particular the approached to invitation, the Board noted a principle of inclusivity for the forum while recognising the practicalities of managing the forum is a matter for the Executive.

Note: PON rejoined the meeting.

11. ARC Report

The Chair of the ARC gave a verbal update on the ARC meeting of 18 June 2025, highlighting the review of the risk register, noting consensus on the risks captured and the approach to risk management across the organisation. The ARC made a recommendation for risk training (including risk appetite) for members of the ARC, Board and the Executive. The ARC have requested a revision to sequencing of the internal audit work programme, bringing forward the audit of the MAC application process.

12. Assessment, Research and Data (ARD) Matters

12.1 Results of a framework contract tender competition
The Director of Assessment, Research and Data (ARD) presented the memo for information at agenda item 12.1 which was noted by the Board. Contracts are due to issue shortly and the lots will be utilised to bring specific areas of expertise into the organisation, this additional resource will aid the processing of applications on hand.

13. Risk Register

The Director of Corporate Affairs gave an overview of the risk register outlining the change to its presentation with a principle high level risk register for the Board to focus on and devolved unit level risk registers, which will continue to be reviewed by the ARC and the Executive's senior management team. The Board welcomed the revision to the risk register.

Action:

- Board recommended to have training session on appetite, look to arrange for September if possible.

14. AOB

The next board meeting will take place on 30th September and 1st October 2025 and incorporate sessions on culture, board development, risk appetite and facilitate an engagement with the Executive.

There will be an upcoming online board session on the competitive MAC process with apologies noted from BMCG. The board were informed of a written resolution process to consider MARA's submission on Ireland's Maritime Security Strategy.

RB shared an article on marine protected areas with the Board **https://archive.ph/2025.06.30-170921/https://www.businesspost.ie/politics/plans-for-marine-protection-law-to-be-dropped-and-folded-into-existing-offshore-wind-regulations/**

The Board conveyed its appreciation to the Executive for their diligence noting progress can be seen and the retention of expertise is critical to the outcome.

Action:

- Chair to extend the Board's gratitude to Anthony Sinnott, former member of the secretariat since the MARA establishment unit, who returned to the parent Department following the end of his secondment.

ENDS.