

Terms of Reference (ToR)

1. Introduction

The Maritime Area Stakeholder Forum (the Forum) is established by the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) to facilitate structured and ongoing engagement with key stakeholders involved in or affected by regulatory activities in Ireland's maritime area. The Forum provides a platform for dialogue, collaboration, and the exchange of information to support MARA's regulatory and strategic functions.

2. Purpose

The primary purpose of the Forum is to:

- Promote open communication between MARA and maritime stakeholders.
- Provide input into MARA's regulatory and strategic priorities, in the context of Government policy.
- Enhance stakeholder understanding of the regulatory framework governing the maritime area.
- Facilitate discussion on sectoral challenges, innovations, and environmental, social, and economic impacts.

Each member has their own roles and functions in the sector and the Forum will not impinge on this in any manner. The Forum will not discuss any applications for consents that are under assessment by MARA or any enforcement matter.

3. Objectives

The objectives of the Forum are to:

- Share updates on maritime area regulatory policy and consenting/licensing processes.
- Solicit stakeholder views on MARA's implementation of the Maritime Area Planning (MAP) Act and identify best practices
- Identify and discuss cross-sectoral issues and emerging trends.
- Inform the development of guidance related to regulatory requirements.
- Inform MARA of developments in the various sectoral areas

4. Scope

The Forum will focus on areas relevant to MARA's mandate, including but not limited to:

- Sectors that engage with MARA in the course of MARA discharging its regulatory functions.
- Marine environmental protection and biodiversity protection.
- Research, innovation, and data sharing

The Forum is not a decision-making body. Its role is advisory and consultative.

5. Membership

5.1 Composition

Members may be drawn from the following categories:

- Industry and commercial sectors with an interest in the maritime area
- Environmental non-governmental organisations (eNGOs)
- Coastal tourism and community groups
- Academic and research institutions
- Government departments and state agencies
- Other relevant stakeholders as appropriate

5.2 Appointment

- Member organisations will be selected by MARA through an open call and/or by invitation to ensure balanced representation.
- Alternates may be nominated to attend in the absence of a member, with advance notice.
- MARA reserves the right to rescind membership of the Forum where an acceptable level of engagement has not been upheld by the member.
- The membership of the Forum will be reviewed by MARA every two years to ensure that representation is balanced and fair. The membership may be rotated between representative groups, where appropriate.

6. Governance and Structure

6.1 Chairing

- The Forum will be chaired by the CEO of MARA or a designated senior official.
- The Chair may appoint a facilitator or independent chairperson for specific meetings or sub-groups.

6.2 Secretariat

- The Secretariat will be provided by MARA.
- Responsibilities of the secretariat include meeting logistics, agenda development, minutes, and documentation.

7. Meetings

- The Forum will meet at least twice per year.
- Additional meetings may be convened as necessary.
- Meetings may be held in person or virtually.
- Agendas and papers will be circulated at least one week in advance.
- Minutes and summaries will be published on MARA's website where appropriate.

8. Working Groups

- The Forum may establish thematic working groups to address specific issues.
- Membership of working groups will be drawn from Forum members and invited experts, who must be approved by the members of the Forum.
- Working groups will report back to the main Forum with findings and recommendations.

9. Code of Conduct

All members are expected to:

- Engage constructively and respectfully.
- Declare any conflicts of interest.
- Maintain confidentiality where required.
- Promote transparency and inclusivity.

10. Communications and Reporting

- Key outcomes and summary reports will be made publicly available.
- Stakeholder feedback will inform MARA's work and be documented where appropriate.
- An annual activity report will be prepared by MARA.

11. Review and Amendment

- These Terms of Reference will be reviewed after the first year of operation.
- Amendments may be made with the agreement of the Forum and MARA.