

# MARA

An tÚdarás Rialála Limistéir Mhuirí  
Maritime Area Regulatory Authority

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

<b>Date</b>	30 September 2025
<b>Venue</b>	Menapia House, Wexford
<b>Time</b>	14:30 – 17:30
<b>Chair</b>	Mark Mellett Vice Admiral DSM (Rtd), Phd (MM)
<b>Board Members Present</b>	Ms. Karen Banks (KB) Dr. Ruth Brennan (RB) Mr. Philip Daly (PD) Mr. Patrick Gibbons (PG) Ms. Niamh Kenny (NK) Mr. Paul O'Neill (PON) Dr. James Massey (JM) Mr. Brendan McGrath (BMCG) (online) Mr. Patrick Moran (PM) Ms. Alma Walsh (AW)
<b>In attendance</b>	MARA Executive – Ms. Laura Brien (CEO), Ms. Sorcha Byrne 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 were raised at agenda item 7.0 – CEO Repot.

#### 2. Welcome and Apologies

Quorum in place. The Chair welcomed board members and members of the Executive to the inaugural board meeting in MARA's HQ.

#### 3. Declarations of Interest

None declared.

#### 4. Minutes

##### 4.1 Board Minutes – The Board approved the following resolution:

That at its meeting on 30 September 2025 the Board adopted the minutes of the MARA board meeting of 18 June 2025 as attached at agenda item 4.1 and of the MARA board meeting of 01 July 2025 subject to amendment to PON attendance.

##### 4.2 ARC Minutes – The Board approved the following resolution:

That at its meeting on 30 September 2025, the Board adopted the minutes of the MARA Audit and Risk Committee meeting of 18 June 2025 attached at agenda item 4.2.

#### 5. Matters Arising

##### 5.1 Action Log

The Board reviewed the action log with discussions focused on the provision of HR services for MARA through the NSSO. The Board action log remains for the Chairperson to work with the CEO to advocate for MARA to retain access to NSSO services, as any alternative approach will impact on cost of MARA operations, available resources and delivery of operations.

#### 5.1(i) 2024 Financial Statements

The Board noted the memo with the CEO clarifying elements of the legal costs incurred for the period. These were incurred in respect of MARA's role as a notice party on litigation with regard to foreshore licenses, and as the implementing body for any modifications of those licenses.

#### 5.1(ii) Board information session on Planning and Development Act

The Board were informed that the legislation has received amendments and commencement is staggered, with the focus to date on terrestrial elements. It was agreed to schedule an information session in early 2026.

#### 5.1(iii) Recruitment Services

The Board noted the updated memo provided by the CEO.

### 6. Governance Matters

#### 6.1 Annual Report

The final annual report for the period 17 July 2023 – 31 December 2024 (Irish and English) was presented to the Board, noting it cannot be shared outside of MARA until confirmation is received from the parent Department that the documents have been laid before the houses of the Oireachtas.

#### 6.2 Oversight and Performance Delivery Agreement

The final Oversight Agreement 2025-2027 was presented to the Board. Noting a copy of the 2025 Performance Delivery Agreement will be provided once signed.

#### 6.3 Q2 update – Statement of Strategy

The Board noted the memo accompanying the quarter 2, 2025 implementation tracker for the statement of strategy.

**Action: The Executive to include the text of any at risk actions in the cover memo for future updates.**

#### 6.4 Conflict of Interest Policy – The Board approved the following resolution:

That at its meeting on 30 September 2025, the Board approved the revised Conflict of Interest policy as appended to agenda item 6.4. subject to amendments at Sections 4 and 5.

#### 6.5 Board Effectiveness Review

The Board agreed to utilise the existing Code of Practice Board Self-Assessment Evaluation Questionnaire in 2025 thereby establishing two years of data.

**Action: The Executive to initiate an external Board evaluation process in early 2026.**

### 7. CEO Report

Matters from the non-executive session were raised with the discussion centred on delivery and timelines and the perception of performance. The Board expressed a need for further information on timelines to enable a balanced response to external narratives. The Board recommended that the executive review the approach used to communicate with applicants regarding status of their applications.

The CEO outlined the position, noting the challenge lies with the backlog of applications received during 2024. The forecast is to average 40 applications per year. Factors that will impact positively on delivery included increased ecologist expertise on staff. Since July 2025 MARA's ecologist staff have doubled. MARA is proactively working with MUL applicants to have regard to Circular MP01/2025, which issued in August. A dedicated resource is now triaging applications that have been received to date.

In terms of MAC processing, technical staff resources have reduced from 3 to 1, reducing processing capacity. The ability to use external technical consultants needs approval from the Department. As part of the organisation optimisation and workforce planning review, the Board recommended consideration be given to ensure that processes are assigned at an appropriate skill level.

Reflecting on the actions and updates taken since July, the Board emphasised the importance of metrics and for MARA to demonstrate a consistency to delivery and enabling transparency via publishing statistics.

The Board confirmed the Executive has the support of the Board.

**Actions:**

- Include timeline data for all applications and percentage figures for applications carried forward from 2023/2024 in future CEO reports.
- Prioritise (i) enhanced communications to applicants and stakeholders and (ii) publish statistics.

## **8. ARC Report**

The Chair of the ARC, NK gave an update on the September ARC meeting, highlighting its engagement with the C&AG on the management letter, noting payroll and procurement issues were discussed. ARC chair noted that they are not a cause of concern but reflect the early establishment phase of the organisation. The ARC will keep track of the management letter recommendations. The internal auditors presented its review of the office fit out project and did not identify any areas of undue concern.

The ARC will consider the outcome of the risk appetite session of 30 September 2025 when it next reviews the risk policy and register.

The Chairperson highlighted his attendance at the ARC meeting on 11 September 2025 and thanked the ARC for its work.

The ARC recommended agenda items 8.2-8.5 to the Board for its approval.

### **8.1 Management Accounts – Q1 and Q2 2025**

The ARC confirms to the Board that the accounts have been reviewed and considered at its meeting on 11 September. The Director of Corporate Affairs gave clarity to the Board on the income which is approximately €6m behind budget, due to original revenue assumptions not materialising, driven by timing of ORESS 2.1 process. The MAC decision is now expected to occur in 2026. It is expected to have an underspend on the Oireachtas grant with the Executive proposing to release funding back to the Department, due largely to an underspend on legal fee budget.

**8.2 Corporate Procurement Plan 2025-2027**– The Board approved the following resolution: That at its meeting on 30 September 2025, the Board approved the Corporate Procurement Plan 2025-2027 as appended to agenda item 8.2.

**8.3 Procurement Approval Thresholds**– The Board approved the following resolution:

That at its meeting on 30 September 2025, the Board approved an amendment to the current procurement approval thresholds relating to business cases and the award of contracts to a VAT inclusive basis as outlined in the memo as appended to agenda item 8.3.

**8.4 Credit Card Policy** – The Board approved the following resolution:

That at its meeting on 30 September 2025, the Board approved the MARA Credit Card Policy as appended to agenda item 8.4

**8.5 ARC Annual Report**– The Board approved the following resolution:

That at its meeting on 30 September 2025, the Board approved the ARC annual report for 2023/2024

## 9. Corporate Affairs Matters

**9.1 Business Case – Office Fit Out** – The Board approved the following resolution:  
That at its meeting on 30 September 2025, the Board approved the business case (A) Furniture and business case (B) ICT Equipment as appended to agenda item 9.1.

### 9.2 Workforce Plan 2026-2028

The CEO presented the memo highlighting the work undertaken to ascertain the resource requirements of the organisation over the next 3 years, to deliver on the statement of strategy, and associated government priorities. The CEO confirmed the proposal was bench marked, and the grade structure is in line with similar type organisations. The Board noted the report, with the Executive to continue to progress engagement with the relevant Government Departments and keep the Board updated.

## 10. Risk Register

The Board noted the risk register presented at agenda item 10.

The outcome of the risk appetite session on 30 September 2025 will be considered as part of Executives review of the risk policy and the risk register.

## 11. Maritime Area Consent Levy Framework

– The Board approved the following resolution:  
That at its meeting on 30 September 2025, the Board approved the MEMO as appended to agenda item 11.0.

## 12. AOB

BMCG questioned if the European Union (Planning and Development) (Renewable Energy) Regulations 2025 have implications for MARA. PON indicated that further work is due from the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment on a separate set of regulations relating to the application of REDIII to other permitting regimes.

Action:

PON to liaise with the Executive with a view to organising an information session on the regulations.

### 12.1 Guidelines for interaction with tobacco industry

The Board noted the guidelines.

### 12.2 Date for next Board meetings

The dates for the next board meetings are 19 November 2025 (10:30-14:00) and 9 December 2025 (14:30-17:30). The location for both these meetings is Sage Advocacy HQ in Dublin. The Executive highlighted the ask from the Assistant Secretary at DCEC to meet the Board of MARA before year end. The Board sought an update from the Executive at the November meeting on performance with information on complexities and timelines.

Actions:

- Chairperson to liaise with the Secretariat to progress use of Sage Advocacy HQ.
- Executive to provide case study on MUL and MAC at the November Board meeting.

### 12.3 Nomination to the Scientific and Technical Reference Committee

– The Board approved the following resolution:

That at its meeting on 30 September 2025, the Board approved the nomination of Dr. Ruth Brennan as a member of the Scientific and Technical Reference Committee.

The Board expressed its thanks to the Executive for the warm welcome to Menapia House and confirmed it will host two board meetings each year in Wexford.