

MARA

An tÚdarás Rialála Limistéir Mhuirí
Maritime Area Regulatory Authority

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

Date	19 November 2025
Venue	Sage Advocacy HQ, Dublin 1
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) Mr. Paul O'Neill (PON) (online) Dr. James Massey (JM) Mr. Brendan McGrath (BMCG) Mr. Patrick Moran (PM)
In attendance	MARA Executive – Ms. Laura Brien (CEO), Ms. Sorcha Byrne and Ms. Aisling Murray (Secretariat), Mr. Frank Ronan (FR) (online), 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 Report.

2. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed board members with apologies from Alma Walsh.

Quorum in place. The Chair expressed thanks to Sage Advocacy for the use of their facilities for the November and December meetings, noting the Executive will determine the venue and locations for future meetings.

3. Declarations of Interest

None declared.

4. Minutes

4.1 Board Minutes – The Board approved the following resolution:

At its meeting on 19 November 2025, the Board adopted the minutes of the MARA board meeting of 30 September 2025 attached at agenda item 4.1 subject to amendment at item 12.

4.2 ARC Minutes – The Board approved the following resolution:

At its meeting on 19 November 2025, the Board adopted the minutes of the ARC meetings of 11 September 2025 and 21 October 2025 attached at agenda item 4.2.

4.3 PPC Minutes - The Board approved the following resolution:

That at its meeting on 19 November 2025, the Board adopted the minutes of the PPC meetings of 30 September 2025 attached at agenda item 4.3.

5. Matters Arising

5.1 Action Log –

The Board review outstanding actions from previous meetings noting an update to the action associated with item 12 of the September minutes.

6. Communication Matters

6.1 Presentation by Carr Communications.

Carr Communications represented by Johnny Fallon and Marie Lynch presented an overview of the Communications Strategy Process.

The feedback from the Board addressed the need for wide and diverse range of stakeholder engagement, building an awareness of ocean opportunity, complexity of governance in the oceans e.g. clarity on MARA's remit, fostering co-operation, linkage of the communications strategy to the Statement of Strategy, importance of internal communications, utilising the website as the primary source of information e.g. of public bodies that do compliance and stakeholder engagement well, recognition of international facing aspect of the organisation, approach to crisis communications and implementation aligned to resources and on phased basis.

Action: Secretariat to share survey link with Board so they can share it among stakeholders.

7. CEO Report

The CEO advised the Board that the report was not in its usual format, focusing instead on the MAC/MUL campaign and utilised briefing recently provided to the Senior Official's Group at the Department of the Taoiseach. The CEO brought the Board through the key themes of the report. MARA currently has 62 staff, with three new starters in the coming weeks. MARA aims to be at its full staffing of 69 in early 2026. Feedback from DCEC is awaited on the Workforce Plan that was submitted.

The CEO provided details on the MAC/MUL campaign currently ongoing until the end of the year. The campaign has set a target of 32 applications to be cleared by end of year, currently 16 have been cleared. The aim is that early in 2026 the backlog will be cleared, and MARA will be operating on a first in first out basis. The Chair and Board recognised and expressed their appreciation for the work being done to tackle the backlog and, on the progress made to date. An update on learnings from the campaign will be presented in Q1 2026.

The CEO updated the Board in relation to MARA's departure from the NSSO. The CEO reassured the Board that there is a Project Plan in place and that engagement with the NSSO is ongoing.

An indicative budget and business plan for 2026 will be presented to the Board at its next meeting in December, as confirmation of 2026 exchequer allocations are awaited.

The Board has requested a paper on route to market options, legislative amendments to the MAP Act and the Competitive MAC Framework for the December meeting.

Actions:

- The Executive to present a paper on route to market to the Board.
- The Executive to present a paper on the Competitive MAC Framework Stakeholder Engagement to the Board.
- The Executive to present learnings from the campaign to the Board in Q1 2026.
- The Executive to present a paper on legislative amendments to the MAP Act.

8. PPC Report

The Chair of the PPC, updated the Board on the September and November PPC meetings and set out the three strands of work the committee will be pursuing:

- The MAC/MUL Campaign
- The establishment and implementation of Task/Performance Management System
- Ongoing Action Plan

Updates on all three will be presented at the next PPC meeting in December.

9. STRC Report

The Chair of the STRC, updated the Board on the November meeting, which was attended by approx. 10 bodies. The Chair thanked the Executive (ARD team) for the Secretariat support. The propose 2026 STRC work programme will review best practice for state bodies in relation to the process for appropriate assessments. The next meeting is scheduled for March 2026.

10. Governance Matters

10.1 Q3 update – Statement of Strategy

The Board noted the memo accompanying the quarter 3, 2025 implementation tracker for the statement of strategy.

Action: Secretariat to circulate an alternative tracker to the Board for consideration.

11. Break

12. Corporate Affairs Matters

12.1 Finance Structure

At its meeting on 19 November 2025, the Board noted the memo on the review of financing structure and accepted its recommendation.

12.2 Budget/Estimate 2026

The Board discussed the memo and noted that this is not the final budget for 2026 as confirmation of exchequer funding from DCEC is still pending.

Action: The Executive to provide a paper on the top five expenditure for MARA to date.

13. ARC Report

13.1 ARCTOR

At its meeting on 19 November 2025, the Board approved the Terms of Reference for the Audit and Risk Committee.

Action: Secretariat to provide ARC with the terms of reference for the Internal Controls audit.

13.2 Procedure for annual review of effectiveness of internal controls

At its meeting on 19 November 2025, the Board approved the Post evaluation of projects Procedure for annual review of effectiveness of internal controls

13.3 Policy and high-level procedure – post evaluation of projects

At its meeting on 19 November 2025, the Board approved the Policy and high-level procedure - Post evaluation of projects.

13.4 Treasury Report

At its meeting on 19 November 2025, the Board approved the Treasury Policy.

13.5 Reserves Policy

At its meeting on 19 November 2025, the Board approved the Reserves Policy.

13.6 Policy for the disposal of assets

At its meeting on 19 November 2025, the Board approved the policy for the disposal of assets.

13.7 Quarterly Accounts Q3 2025

The Board noted the memo accompanying the quarter 3, 2025 accounts, with a typo on page 2 to amend €680M to €680k.

Following on from the ARC agenda item on diversity, the Board noted the topic should be addressed at a central government level.

14. Risk Management

14.1 Risk Policy Review

At its meeting on 19 November 2025, the Board approved the Risk Policy.

14.2 Risk Register

The Director of Corporate Affairs advised the Board that the language use and matrix had been updated following the Risk Session held at the Board Away day in September. The central risk register has been rescored based on this change.

Risk 3 has been split between risk 3 and 3a following the addition of a risk from the ARC, an additional Risk 10 has also been added.

Action: Language for risk 3a to be refined to accurately capture the risk.

KB left meeting

15. AOB

15.1 Board Effectiveness Questionnaire -reminder

The Board was reminded to submit any outstanding questionnaires as soon as possible as the deadline was 18 November.

15.2 Date for next Board meetings

Date for next Board meeting confirmed for December 9th in Sage Advocacy HQ in Dublin.

Copy of the 2026 Board work programme was circulated to the Board, more detail will be provided at the next meeting. It was agreed to move the ARC September 2026 meeting to 10th September.